



## Emil Witton

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*Emil Witton was born in Germany in 1919. In his late teens he emigrated to Australia with his parents and his wife Hannah as Jewish refugees who had been persecuted in Nazi Germany. He had trained as a compositor and printing machinist in Berlin. He completed his apprenticeship in Australia and worked as a compositor in a number of Sydney typesetting houses until he was allowed to join the army as a refugee alien in a non-combatant unit in 1942. After the war he started a small printing business with his brother which over the years grew to be quite a successful medium-sized operation. He retired and sold the business in 1986, when he was in his late sixties, and since then has worked as a volunteer for Amnesty International.*

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My father's family came from that part of Germany that was alternately German and Polish. My father's generation considered themselves as Germans. The cities were German and the countryside was Polish, and in the northern part there is a town that was called Gnesen (now Gnezno) where my father was born. Close to there is a little place called Witkowo and our original surname, Witkowski, means a chap who comes from Witkowo. (Witkowo still exists, by the way.) My father's family moved to the Rhineland when he was in his teens, and he stayed in Germany until he came to Australia in 1939.

My mother's grandfather was a doctor in a district not very far from Berlin, and they lived in rather tight circumstances, and had fourteen children that grew up. Every one of the boys either started a business or was an academic. Today there's hardly a place on the earth where there aren't some descendants of those fourteen children.

One of the fourteen children started a newspaper about 1866-67, and his

younger brother, my grandfather Emil Mosse, joined him at a later stage and they were partners until my grandfather died comparatively early, in 1911. They founded the *Berliner Tageblatt*, which, until Hitler, was one of the really world-renowned German newspapers - liberal in outlook. It was pretty often in trouble in the time of Imperial Germany prior to 1914 - it was a bit like *Le Temps* in France and *The Times* in England. The name Rudolf Mosse was very well-known all over Europe because they invented something that led on to become what we now know as advertising agencies. What they did was, with all the little local newspapers in towns like Hamburg, and Munich, and every little village, they bought the paper's advertising space and filled it with ads they could accept at their agencies all over Germany. They were able to accept advertisements for any other newspaper in Germany. That was what made them famous - and rich.

The paper itself exploded onto the German scene at the time of the war between Prussia and France in 1870-71, because the management of Rudolf Mosse bought carrier pigeons and sent them with their journalists to the front, and it turned out that because of this the *Berliner Tageblatt* knew what was happening on the front before the Prussian High command did in Berlin!

When my grandfather died in 1911, the newspaper remained in the hands of the heirs of Rudolf Mosse until Hitler closed it down. The last one, Hans Lachmann Mosse still carried on some of the advertising agency business that was outside Germany, but my family had been completely out of it from the time my grandfather died.

I grew up in Berlin in a very rich family endowed with everything you can think of. I had a fantastic childhood, with a family that was interested in everything. I was the youngest of four. It was absolutely certain that everybody would study. I went to a public high school, not to a private school, because my parents were very strong in their beliefs about that, and at the same time we got any sort of help at home that we needed. My parents were liberal, with a definite leaning to the left - but not socialists. I went to a very special school - the French Gymnasium in Berlin, which was founded in the 1680s by French Huguenots, the Protestants who had been violently thrown out of France by the French Catholics. It was a private school of the Huguenot community until the end of the nineteenth century, when they couldn't afford to run it any more and it was taken over by the Prussian state. But it kept the character of a French school. The teaching language in most subjects was French, after the first three years. In my time you had to do nine years' high school. It was an extremely liberal school, and we were taught to question everything, not to believe what the teacher said but to ask questions and look things up for ourselves, and all my life I've been very happy that I went to that school. I didn't do any jobs as a boy to pick up some spare pocket money the way my children did here when they were young. I don't know if that sort of thing existed in Europe at that time - I suspect not.

In 1937 I passed my *Abitur*, the exam that entitles you to go to university. There was no question that I wouldn't go on to further study, but in the meantime of course Hitler had risen to power, and going to university became virtually impossible for me, as a Jew.

The question was, what was I going to do? Of course if Hitler hadn't been around my family would have wanted me to study for one of the professions, probably something technical like engineering or something like that. But because of the political situation in Germany under Hitler, it was out of the question that I could do that. So I really didn't get as far as even knowing what I wanted to study. I was

the youngest in my class at high school, but I think it probably would have been something technical because I was rather brilliant in mathematics, while in languages I had some problems at times. The political realities meant that the choice of occupation was something that would give you a living after you emigrated overseas.

Looking back today, I think I am better off with what happened than I would have been in that privileged... I'm not talking about money here, but better off for being in Australia rather than staying in Europe. Of course what happened was traumatic, but I think I've been lucky in what happened to me after I came to Australia. But I do have great resentment towards Hitler and towards the German people for what they did, but not as far as I am concerned personally. The quality of my life I think is much better than it would have been otherwise.

So, with higher academic study denied me by the political circumstances in Germany at that time, the idea of printing came up again. My mother had been told all about printing by her father and she knew quite a bit about it. Then my sister married, and the man she married, at a later stage, got into the printing industry through photography. He became, in the course of his life, one of *the* experts on photogravure. I'm talking about 1934 - around that time, and quite a few of the German illustrated papers were printed by photogravure by then. He pushed for me to go into the printing trade - he wanted me to go into an ultra-modern one, but my mother had more conservative ideas about printing, so it finished up that after I'd finished my *Abitur* I became a compositor's apprentice at a Jewish printing place in Berlin, Siegfried Scholem which printed the *Juedische Rundschau*, which was the biggest of the Jewish newspapers in Germany then. There weren't many anyhow, but it was about the best-known one - and of a very high standard.

So I learnt the same way as Gutenberg - using a composing stick and single letters that you used over and over again. At that time, all advertisements and all headlines were still handset, even in this comparatively modern printing place in Berlin in 1937-38. Linotype existed, but was expensive, so small places used a machine called a *Typograph*. It was quite ingenious. There was a string of metal rods at the back of the machine which went up, and little hooks held the moulds for the type characters, similar to the Linotype. When you pressed a key one of them fell down and they went one behind the other on a slug. There was a pot with molten lead which cast each line of type in one piece. Then one lifted the basket with the metal rods up and the moulds went back into their positions because they stayed on the rod all through the casting process. They didn't each have to be re-filled the way Linotype had to. It was very slow compared to Linotype, but it had the advantage that it worked in Hebrew, too, and part of the paper was printed in Hebrew, which is like Arabic in that you only write the consonants and the vowels are understood, and also like Arabic, Hebrew goes from right to left.

So I was indentured there, and I learnt a lot. I did everything from getting lunches to sweeping the floors and was yelled at by the journeymen and so forth. I learnt a lot typographically. There was a second apprentice there who had a background similar to mine and he was in his last year, and he taught me a lot on the artistic side of printing and typography. (He was very artistic, and he ended up in England with Penguin Books and became their youngest Director and a personal friend of Allen Lane. Allen Lane was the man who invented the paperback - which, when you think about it, is quite an extraordinary contribution to society by bringing books, which had previously only existed in expensive hard

cover, within the financial reach of nearly everybody.)

The wages in my first year were very low, but in the second year they doubled. Knowing that I would emigrate in the near future, I chose to do something that was frowned upon - to learn to be both a compositor *and* a printer - (a machinist). In those days (and it was the same in Australia, too, at that time) you were either one or the other. You couldn't be both. Of course there were people who were, but as far as the union was concerned it should not exist. (I don't know how things are today in this regard, since the advent of computer technology in the printing industry.) In those days they were considered to be two different arts. The original compositor was considered to quite an extent to be an artist as well as a craftsman, while the machinist was looked upon as more of a technical person. The compositor was definitely higher up the status ladder. In the early industrial era compositors were the first ones to earn wages considerably above most other workers - one Mark per hour was the magic figure in Germany. The metal industry later overtook them and lathe operators and so on then earned more, but it was the compositors who were the first to get one Mark an hour. And their union has always been very left wing in Germany - because they could read! (*Laughs*).

We had something like twenty compositors, but only ten or twelve machinists, because hand-setting is very slow. And afterwards, every piece of type has to be put back again in its correct place in the case. There were people who did only that - all their life! But they could pick up a full stop and tell you exactly where it belonged. (Actually they had a system of different nicks in the base of the letter which helped to identify where it belonged.)

After a year's apprenticeship as compositor I chose to change over as a machinist. There was a funny word in the German language for being skilled in both trades - *Schweizer Degen* - "Swiss sword", probably because Swiss swords were sharp on both sides, and there was a very nasty ditty that rhymes with *Schweizer degen* that says that a *Sweizer degen* is somebody who can neither print, nor work as a compositor!

It was an excellent choice for me, deciding to become a printer. I loved printing - I loved the trade in itself. I really got interested in it and tried to do something good with what I was doing. It was more than just a job for me once I became really interested in it. When I had my own printing business in Australia at a later stage there was a lot of satisfaction in turning out quality work and work with nice layouts that looked nice.

So I left Germany and came to Australia in June 1939, where I found out that because I was only nineteen I could not get full wages - not till I was twenty one. So after doing various short-term jobs I found a Hungarian who had started a small printing business - Palace Print - with one small platen machine. He was looking for somebody to do the setting for him and when I turned up he was quite pleased, and he indentured me until I was 21 - for about twenty one months. I was glad about this, because it meant that I couldn't be given notice, and at that time that was really important.

The Hungarian who had apprenticed me went broke just before I had completed my apprenticeship. There were eventually four partners, and they were trying to live off one machinist and one compositor. After they went broke I found two brothers who had a very small printing place called Wynwood Press, and they took me on for the last few months of my apprenticeship. But the day I came out

of my apprenticeship they told me they could no longer afford me, because my salary went up considerably once I got full wages.

But by that time I was in the Union, and a fully-qualified compositor as far as they were concerned. I knew several people there and I started to get jobs through the Union. Most of them were nothing extraordinary - places like R.T.Kelly,... and I was at Simmons Ltd - I hated that job because they used to give me notice every week, and then tell me on Thursday that I could stay. And that went on and on and on. The foreman was the biggest bastard out - called me "reffo" and things. The chaps were all friendly, though, even the foreman's son, who actually hated his father. I went to the Union and complained, but they said, "Look, with the way things are and the number of people out of work, we can't help you." They pointed out that if I didn't go back each time they told me I could stay, then the Union couldn't help me get another job. So one week finally came where they forgot to tell me I could come back - and I was glad! (*Laughs*).

Eventually I got a job as a compositor in a Linotype place - Wallace and Knox. That was a good job and I liked it. (From the time I left Wynwood Press I'd worked as a full compositor.) The war had begun and I was classified as "enemy alien" and had to get permission to go to work in the city from Rose Bay, and I had to appear at the police station once a fortnight, and things like that. When I joined the army I was still an "enemy alien" and only about six months later were those in the army and the other refugees from Hitler classified as "friendly aliens". (Years later, when my daughter was at school, she asked me if I'd ever been fingerprinted. "Yes," I said, "in Germany by the Nazis because I was a Jew and in Australia by the government because I was a German!")

Wallace and Knox put me on night shift. I had to do all sorts of pleading with the police to be allowed out at night to go to my job. They must have thought I might send signals to the enemy or something. Night shift meant a bit more money, and we started saving. We saved ten bob a week.

Before that I was on the afternoon shift for a while - I think that went from four till eleven at night or something like that - but I hated it because it disrupted the whole household at home. We had a small child and those hours made things very difficult. But then they put me on the late night shift. They couldn't work out why I was happy about that. There were only about three or four of us working that shift, compared to around forty or so on the day shift. I loved that shift because we could have dinner at home, and I went to work and came back for breakfast. Then I slept for three or four hours and we'd have the rest of the day to ourselves before I went back to work again. On one or two days I slept right through to catch up with my sleep. The only trouble was, though, on weekends I always needed some sleep during the day. But you get used to that sort of life after a while.

I think I was with Wallace and Knox for about eighteen months. I was a table hand while I was there - I didn't do any Linotype. I learnt Linotype at the tech., but I've never used it at work. The stuff that came from the machines either had to be cleaned up and cut to size, and went to the customer wrapped up in newspaper, or it had to be made up properly, spaced out and arranged according to copy. I liked the work, it was satisfying. The people I worked with, including the bosses, were friendly, personal and co-operative.

From the beginning of the war on, I tried to enlist. As far as I was concerned the war against Hitler was also my war. But the authorities wouldn't take us. Not until

Singapore fell did they change the rules somewhat, and allied aliens could join up, or they could be forced into non-fighting units. Refugee aliens could volunteer for non-fighting units or be drafted into the Allied Works Council, where they were sent usually far away for charcoal burning.

I volunteered immediately, left Wallace and Knox, and I got into the Second Employment Company. We had a good life. We were never maltreated. We occasionally worked very hard, but I stress the "occasionally". We had good conditions. We had full rights as soldiers, except that we could not get out of our units, and we could not rise above the rank of corporal - though there were a couple of Acting Sergeants. We were stationed at Ascot Racecourse, out at Mascot, which is part of the airport now. Hannah was at home at Rose Bay, and we had official home leave every second night, but for all practical purposes we went home nearly every night and came back at six in the morning.

After 1943 I was sent for six months to Spring Hill, near Orange. There I loaded and unloaded everything you could think of. Did they take advantage of my skills as a compositor, you ask? Of course not! This was the army! There was a bit of pick and shovel work, but mainly we loaded and unloaded things like bombs and ammunition, barbed wire, clothing. For two years we unloaded and re-loaded the whole wool clip. We worked in three shifts. That was the time we really worked, and we knew it was important and we didn't make any difficulties. We worked straight eight hour shifts with short breaks. Everyone had those big double hooks, and after a while you could move the bales around really efficiently, without doing any really heavy work. I learnt quite a few things when I was in the army.

We were very well treated. We had some NCOs who made remarks about foreigners and so on, but they were shifted very quickly once we started to complain. Our officers were excellent. We were lent out to other units and if someone there called us foreigners or anything like that we used to go on strike immediately. Then they had to ring our camp, and when they got one of our officers they were told to talk to us the same as they would talk to other Australian soldiers. We were very well-treated most of the time.

I did have a blue with my Captain who sent me to Spring Hill, 300km from Sydney when Hannah was pregnant with Ronnie, my second son - he was born about four months after I went up there - and when I made application to be sent back to Sydney for the birth he knocked me back. I went to the Lieutenant and when I told him he said, "Typical. He hasn't got any children and he doesn't know what it means. I can give you special leave - but only once, so don't go down till you're sure it's on. I can't do it a second time." So I got down to see Hannah for a few days when Ronnie was born. I even got back late from the leave because of a train delay, but as we were only a small group everybody knew what was going on and they covered for me.

When I got back from Spring Hill, the Sergeant Major took pity on me, knowing that I had a baby at home, and I got a job with the Comforts Fund where they were packing parcels for troops overseas. I was one of three guards there. We didn't have any work to do at all. We had a rifle, but we'd never been told how to shoot and we didn't have ammunition or anything else. But we were known to be honest, because there were tobacco tins there and tins of things that you couldn't get for love nor money at that time. The only really strict rule was that one of us had to be there all the time - Christmas, New Year, Palm Sunday - it didn't matter what... Yom Kippur! So that meant we had one day on and two days off. So I got a job as a compositor with H.A. Viles on the two days off... until the bloody

printers went on strike! I'd worked at Harry Viles before I went to Wallace and Knox, and they were that short of tradesmen at that time they were happy to have somebody who could help out. I was glad of a bit of extra money, and he was glad to have someone who knew what he was doing.

My brother, who was an engineer, was in the same unit as I was, and we were together most of the time. (By the way, that unit had 22 different nationalities - you could hear any language except English!)

It was in early 1945 that I was naturalised. Then I immediately joined the AIF. (I could only do that once I'd been naturalised.) In the middle of that year I was under orders to go for jungle training, then go overseas, when the bomb fell on Hiroshima. The Japanese knew I was coming, and surrendered! (*Laughs*).

I was discharged early in 1946. As I had joined the AIF and volunteered to go overseas I had acquired the full rights of a returned soldier after the war, and had all the advantages of home loans, tools of trade, etc. So, as with most things in my life, it all worked out pretty well. That was my career in saving the Fatherland! (*Chuckles*).

While we were in the army together, my brother and I decided that we'd start a printing business together when we were discharged. I was discharged three months earlier than my brother, and I started hunting around for premises, and for a small platen. All I needed (and all I finished up with) was a small room. I had to buy the type in - I had to buy everything, but we had deferred pay. Between us, it was quite a bit of capital, and my mother, unknown to us, sold some jewellery and gave us that money.

We started in one small room in Rawson Place, and we paid key money to get it. Rawson Place was a rabbit warren - I'm sure it was standing there when Captain Cook arrived. It had a high loading on its insurance premiums because they were absolutely sure that if there was a fire there wouldn't be one place left. Most printing businesses and businesses associated with printing seemed to always be in old buildings like that in those days. My brother had no previous experience with printing, so for the first few weeks I did everything. The first thing I taught my brother to do was to cut paper, but later on he mainly dealt with the customers. I looked after the factory, which was probably just as well because I can't sell anything - I'd be more likely to tell people they don't need it!

After a while we put on a machinist. At that time manpower was *very* short. It was very hard to get anybody. You'd put an ad in the paper, and you'd hire someone. They'd agree to start the next morning but then they wouldn't turn up, and you never saw them again. Or else they'd start in the morning, say they liked the job, then go out for lunch and that would be the last you saw of them. That was very disappointing, until you finally got some employees that you could rely on not to suddenly disappear. I'd say we were working something like a sixty five hour week in the early days of the business. But I enjoyed myself. I was glad I was doing it. I liked working. I worked most Saturdays and I worked quite a few Sundays - to finish jobs that had to be delivered. I had then one machinist, and he stayed permanently - for many years, in fact.

What happened then was, after six months, by a pure chance I heard that Wynwood Press (the place where I served the last few months of my apprenticeship) were selling out to start in the rag trade. So what we did was to swap rooms. I bought their place, sold the one machine I had, and took my

setting stuff and paper and so on with me. We bought into each other's businesses, and I became a Director in the clothing business. When we'd changed premises I resigned the Directorship about six months later. This way we got around the problem of having to pay exorbitant key money in both places.

So we'd bought a fully functioning printing outfit, and for a reasonable price. Our customers had till then been mainly the people we'd been in the army with at Mascot, who'd all started businesses. Although there were Greeks, Italians, Yugoslavs - as I said, 22 nationalities - in the main they were central European Jews. Once they got out of the army all of them started buying or selling something. I don't remember how we managed to make it known that we were in the printing business other than sending out cards and such, but in the early years they were the major part of our printing business. Also, by that time we knew what they needed to start a business, and many of them had not set up a business in Australia before, and we used to advise them how to go about it. Some became quite well-known large businesses.

Among the machinery we got with Wynwood Press was a German cylinder machine - not a two-revolution one, though. We could do colour work, and from then on it was more than just invoices and business cards, and we did wine labels, catalogues, several four-colour jobs. (This is right at the beginning, still.) It went on like that for some years. The premises were at No 20 Market, which was in between Sussex Street and Day Street. (Gone completely now, of course.) It was a street shop, and one printing press was in the window. It was a very old building with an old couple living upstairs.

Next the ANZ came along and bought the building because they wanted a branch there, and they knew they had a fight on their hands. We were two returned soldiers, and they couldn't throw us out - they didn't have a chance. So they started offering money - quite decent money. We started looking around, and we found out it wasn't enough money, so we told them it was all off. Well, it worked! (And I think we probably could have got even more than we did eventually.) We bought half a floor in a building in Little Regent Street - eventually it became a full floor. It had been a clothing factory, and I think we got 22 sewing machines with it. We had enough friends in the rag industry that we had no trouble getting rid of them.

We actually bought the factory - so that the landlord couldn't object. He couldn't object to new owners of the clothing factory. Then we closed the clothing factory down once we got the printing business set up. We played Directors and musical chairs again in order to get around the owner, who would have wanted key money had we done it any other way. At that time you couldn't get a lease, or weekly rent, without key money. It was always key money. Key money was black, for a start. The landlord got a heck of a lot of money which the Taxation Department didn't know anything about. It was actually illegal.

As I said, we were only in Rawson Place for six or nine months, then we were for two and a half years in Market Street, and it was only after we moved to Little Regent Street that we became a printing company of a halfway reasonable size. I started off there doing my own comping, then after a short time we bought another machine, an old-type letterpress machine - a double demi one. Then we bought a big, fully automatic guillotine. That's when I switched over to doing the cutting only. I mean, I did a lot of office work, and a lot of quotes and things like that, but as far as practical work was concerned, very soon after we moved into Little Regent Street, I did only the cutting. Already in Market Street I'd had a

compositor, but in Regent Street we put an apprentice on. He was very good and fell into place very quickly - he actually stayed for many years after finishing his apprenticeship. He freed me to do the cutting and the office work. There was enough guillotine work to keep me busy because by then we had three machines.

A guillotine operator is as skilled a person as a compositor or machinist. You set up the machine to cut to tolerances of a millimetre... there was great satisfaction in that for me when I was doing it myself and preparing paper for the machines. I didn't particularly want to go back to being a compositor, and although I was trained to do it, I was never very happy operating the printing machines myself. I was too impatient and inclined to hurry it up. Designing things, setting up the type, and cutting the paper to the needed size - as well as trimming the end product to the correct size after it was printed was what I preferred to do. A few times I worked at the machine - originally a hand-fed platen - but I've never been really taken with that. Also, I wasn't all that good at it. I could tell somebody else what to do but I wasn't good at doing it myself.

Guillotines cut very exactly, and you never lose the sense of danger - you have to be watchful all the time. I don't think I ever did anything careless or foolish, but I was down like a ton of bricks if somebody interfered. Throughout my printing career I didn't have a serious accident in my place. Given that there's so much machinery involved, I don't remember all that many bad accidents. Early on, when I was working at Palace Point I remember my boss was in a hurry and got his hand badly bruised, but by and large people didn't seem to get hurt seriously. When I was an apprentice in Germany a metal piece hadn't been pushed properly into the springs and it jumped out and went into the machine. I wasn't popular when that happened, but I didn't get physically hurt. The circular saws that were used for cutting slugs of Linotype could be dangerous if you were inattentive, but with the changing technology it's all even less dangerous these days than it was.

In Market Street, and even back in Rawson Place, the women of the family worked as table hands. My mother, and my wife Hannah, and at times my brother's wife too. They worked around each other, a couple of days a week each, doing the collating and folding and things like that. We had a little folder that they all learned to use, but we used to send any binding out. Then, by the time we were in Little Regent Street we had fully qualified table hands.

From very early on I made it a policy to employ married women as table hands - very often they had children and could only work part-time. At Regent Street I had two women who each worked three days a week, which meant that one day a week they overlapped. And if things got really busy I could usually call on them to work extra days for a couple of weeks. Then at a much later stage I had one top-class table hand. She was a lovely person - as rough as blazes, with a heart of gold - an absolutely gorgeous woman. She could lift and throw stuff around...she was amazing.

At the height of things I had a compositor working for me, (later on I did without a compositor because offset came in and I didn't need one any more), I had three machinists, one for each printing machine, two table hands, one woman in the office, Peter (my brother's son and later a partner in the business), Paul and me, and a cleaner who came in every morning. At that time it was quite a substantial operation, and practically all of them got paid well over the award.

My brother Paul retired in 1978-79, though he remained a Director for quite a while afterwards. Then eventually he left altogether and his son Peter and I carried on until the building in Little Regent Street was sold. The new owners informed us that the rent was going to go up by 100%, that the goods lift would be replaced with a small passenger lift, and I don't know what else. We could have sued him, but by that time I was over 65 and I didn't want to go on with it any more. My brother had died by then, and my nephew basically wanted to get out too. If we had kept going he probably would have stayed, but he did not want to start all over again. He bought a business that supplied paper plates to small offset printers. So we sold the business - the machinery and the customers. We still got a commission for twelve months afterwards.

So that was the end for printing as far as I was concerned. Despite my interest in printing all my life, I was too old and not interested enough any more to face up to the big changes that were coming over the industry. I had no interest to re-learn completely how to do things and what to do, and I knew I was too old to do it practically. And to be in charge of people who knew ten times as much as I did was something I've always avoided all my life if possible. So I had decided I would not stay in the printing industry in any shape or form. When we sold it I agreed to be employed by the new owner for six months at a very good salary to attend to my customers there and to advise him what we had done as far as quoting and so on.

For years we printed the program for the Sydney Film Festival. Originally it was letterpress. Then it became offset, but it was still Lino-set, photographed, and then printed offset. We printed it ourselves. The last two years it was computer-set, and when I saw what happened there - how, instead of pushing things around you cut a piece of film and move it, then re-photograph it - I knew that I wouldn't be able to become efficient in that any more. And that's when I said, "It's enough." And I've not tried to keep up. I'm not interested any more. It happened to be a moment where one era finished and another one started, and what's going on today I haven't got a clue - not in any detail, anyway. While I can use a computer - mainly as a word-processor, and I'm working on a computer program in my voluntary work at Amnesty. I can't do programming and things like that, but I know I've got the brains to do it all if it had been at a different time in my life. But I think 76 is enough, and I'm going to enjoy myself.

Printing machines in operation have a special noise. Once you've heard it you never forget it. You know it immediately. It's sheet paper running through the machine. You mentioned the smell of the ink and the handling of the type, but I don't know that they were such a satisfaction to me. For me the main satisfaction was in the end result - and again, I'm not talking about money here - I've never been really geared to getting money out of it, though of course it was necessary and the money side of it gave me big worries at times - some very, very nasty periods, though over all the business allowed us to lead a very comfortable life. There was a definite satisfaction in supplying something on time, and doing it a little bit better than was necessary.

The first proof was always interesting to see come off the press. After you've been a compositor for any length of time you don't notice whether things are upside-down and back-to-front or the right way round - you become so used to reading type both ways. As long as I look at it with the head of the page facing me I know what it's going to look like when it's printed. Occasionally you might stop and think for a bit about lower case Ps and Qs, or Bs and Ds.

We were talking about dangers associated with printing before. At the beginning of the century the amount of lead in the letters that compositors handled was something of a hazard, and in those days it was generally known that compositors didn't live much beyond the age of thirty five or so because the letters rubbed together and you got lead dust on your fingers from them. When I was an apprentice, washing yourself carefully before lunch and at the end of the day was absolutely essential. Apprentices also got a third of a litre of milk for lunch free, which was supposed to counteract lead poisoning. They had a special vacuum cleaner for the type cases to remove the lead dust from all the little compartments.

The first restrictions on lead in ink that I remember must have been about the early fifties, when you weren't allowed to use ink with lead in it if you were printing something that would be used by children. I don't think any of the inks today have lead in them. Overall, in the printing places that I've worked in, I'd say that the health hazards were negligible. Handset type had virtually disappeared by the fifties - Linotype took over most of it so even the danger from lead there became minimal. Of course the Linotype metal also was mainly lead, but as soon as it was printed it was melted down and reused. Because it was a soft metal it would wear easily, so if you had long runs you'd get stereotypes and electros made. For very long runs sometimes you could go to stainless steel - but that was for runs in the millions.

I mentioned that when I was apprenticed I learnt both composing and machining - because I didn't know what I would need to do when I left Germany. But the union in Australia wouldn't let you do both, so I worked all the time here as a compositor, until I got my own place. When I arrived here there were separate unions, and I joined the compositors' union. By the time I came to Australia handsetting was on the way out, and only little bits here and there were handset. Proofreading was a separate thing, but in the place where I trained in Berlin some of the comps would occasionally do proofreading - though not everyone. In Australia though, to a large extent people either read their own work or gave it to the bloke next to them to read. Today there seems to be minimal proofreading - from my point of view it's abominable.

There seems to be hardly any attention paid to typographical aesthetics these days. Apart from what gets past the Spell-Check on the computer, the spacing between words and lines is very subtle. The spacers in Linotype machines were conical and a bar pushed them up so that all the spaces were exactly what was needed to get a nicely justified line. Of course there are some people today who know about these things, but most people don't seem to know what I am talking about if I bring up the subject.

You ask me if the job was stressful, because the printer is the last link in the chain and is nearly always under pressure for delivery. Yes, there was that stress for most of the time - of something that had to be ready, or even if it didn't actually *have* to be ready it had been promised, and you always tried to keep your promise. Over the years I developed a different attitude to that problem than I think most printers did. I didn't make any promises that I didn't think I could keep, and if possible keep comfortably. If I could do it by next Wednesday I'd promise next Friday, while many printers used to do it the other way around, and then find excuses for the late delivery. But if something happened and I knew I wasn't going to be able to do it by Friday as promised, I rang on Wednesday or Tuesday to tell them they couldn't have it on time, and that paid off very handsomely. If somebody came to me with a job that I knew I wouldn't be able to

deliver when they wanted it, then I just said "Sorry, I can't." What's the good of promising it when I knew that I wouldn't be able to do it by then? While I must have lost some jobs over that, I think in the long run it paid off, and because I was like that people believed me when I had to ring up and tell them something had gone wrong.

Printers have a close relationship with their platemakers and blockmakers. When I learnt in Berlin, stereotypers were part of the printing business I learnt at and I saw how it was done then. I didn't learn it, but learnt to know how it was done. I remember the original way they made the flong moulds for the stereos was to put wet material onto the type. The material was hit with a brush to force it into all the hollows, then it was heated and dried and the lead cast into it. After that they'd do any handwork necessary. In Australia it was all a completely separate part of the printing industry. Stereotyping I dropped after a few years because it was unsatisfactory. Basically, stereos were lousy. They were cheap and nasty. You needed extra time for make-ready if you wanted to do a good job because they were uneven and of different heights. Now all that has gone away completely, of course, because of the new technology. By the time you got into offset the whole problem disappeared because everything was done on the neg that was being used for the platemaking.

But when I was working, blockmaking (and later, platemaking) became a very important part of the business because around thirty percent of the jobs in letterpress printing needed some kind of blockmaking, or electrotyping or something like that - and later, platemaking for the offset process was absolutely essential because every job needed a plate of some kind. We didn't make our own plates, although many printers did. With some small exceptions, I used one person to do my engraving and platemaking all the way through. I got onto a firm by pure chance - I don't remember how it came about - and I became friendly in a personal way with the young son of the boss at that time, who later on became The Boss. We were about the same age, and at a later stage his wife became my secretary. I'm still in touch with them occasionally today.

The other part of the printing business we haven't mentioned is the bookbinder. We did a certain amount ourselves - the ordinary quarter-bound books (unless there were really big quantities). As I said earlier, in the early years we did the Sydney Film Festival programs completely ourselves, but we had to send them out for folding because we didn't have a machine big enough. You worked with bookbinders, and there again I didn't change often, though there weren't any bookbinders I was as close with as I was with the blockmaker. You had a very personal dealing with them, though, because you didn't just send stuff down to them and wait for it to come back - you discussed it and argued about delivery times. Very often something still had to be done to the job and it came back into your own place to be finished off. So it was at the beginning and the end of the process that the outside work came in.

You ask me to describe my average day as a printer. Well, when I first started the business I always started early - in fact I still do that today when I go in to Amnesty. My starting time was seven o'clock - at work. It's what I've been used to all my life. In the first years with my own place I often wouldn't finish till eight or nine o'clock of an evening. That went on for six or seven years, but as things settled down I was more likely to finish around six or seven at night. I always had lunch. Morning and afternoon tea times I usually used to do something, but at lunch I wouldn't do anything unless there was something important to be done. I often used to sleep during my lunch time. It was funny: there was the boss asleep

and everybody tiptoeing around! In the last ten or twelve years I still started early, and left between three and four - that was probably after I turned sixty. My employees worked standard award hours, of course.

You ask me if, being a printer, I felt involved with something which was of extreme cultural importance. Yes, definitely. But there are plusses and minuses that come from printing. Look at some of the things that it is being used for. For me printing has always been a two-edged sword. The church used it - even further back than Gutenberg, when people couldn't read. You can even go back to the Egyptians and you've still got it. There are, of course, cultures like our Aborigines that don't have it at all. But for me, it's always been one of the very, very big inventions that completely changed political life. Completely. Because people started to be able to read, because things could be brought to the masses or however you like to put it, but I always realised that it can be used for or against anything. Even supporting the status quo is a political statement.

Does any period stand out in my memory as the best time of it all? There were times that were particularly worrying, but towards the end - I finished in 1986, and the years between, say, 1978 and 1982 were very satisfactory ones. The business was running very well, but after that we started to be not competitive enough because we didn't have the new equipment.

Would I do it all over again? You mean business? The business was a means to a way of life, and while I enjoyed what I was doing, it was still a business. It wasn't an art. I was not a painter or a composer. I liked to play around with layout and design, but over the years that got less and less. I think I could have gone into something else other than printing and still had the same kind of satisfaction from it, and still use what I was doing to lead the type of life that I have lead.

Did retirement bring any problems? No. I had no trouble at all making the transition. I think this was because my home life was never secondary. After I retired I just got on with the other things in my life. I quickly expanded my activities in Amnesty, but if it hadn't been that it would have been something else that I thought was worthwhile putting an effort into. And I'm still doing that. As well as doing it because it's something that is good, and makes sense to do, I also do it because I need something to do to keep myself occupied, something for my own satisfaction, not just the satisfaction that comes from doing something that you think is worthwhile. I can't sit around seven days a week. I need something to do. There was no question of staying at home.

But when I think about satisfaction, I do it on a personal basis. The business was... well, except for the first years business and the personal was for me very separate. In my recollection, the beautiful years were on the personal basis and not on the business basis. My working life, basically, enabled me to have a wonderful life. While I enjoyed the work itself, and while it gave me satisfaction, it was the personal side of life - my family and friends, and my political involvement - that has always been much more important than the working life itself.

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