

FAREWELL TO ARMS

Sam Berner

As a new leaf is starting for AUSIT, and we move our National Administration to PAMS, it is time to pay tribute to the person who had, for so many years, been the voice of AUSIT. We all know Georges Mayes as the Administrator, but few know him as the networks engineer and technical translator. And although he will no longer answer the 1800 number, he is not leaving AUSIT – just changing hats.

For me, this was a bit of “re-discovering Georges” whom I only got to know personally at the last AUSIT Awards and immediately sensed there was more than met my eye in those half serious utterances. I was right. This interview was done in a hurry, as Georges is about to be beamed up by **Scotty** to Mauritius, and I am glad it went as smoothly as it **did**, the hardest part being Georges’ hesitancy to provide a mug shot “so that the guys at Port Hedland don’t find out I escaped”.

SB: I used to think you were French, but you’re not.

I was born in Mauritius - a colony that had been French for a very long time before being taken over by the British. So I am bilingual because although technically the official language was English, both English and French were spoken in the parliament, and the French-speaking Catholic Church had more weight than the English-speaking Anglican Church.

When Mauritius became a British colony, Britain was interested in the sugar produced by the French settlers (on the backs of African slaves, of course) and kept amicable relations with the sugar producers, so Mauritius remained very French. I spoke French at home, but at secondary school the HSC exam papers came from England. I therefore studied Shakespeare and Chaucer (Canterbury Tales) towards the end of secondary, after having become familiar with Molière in the earlier years of secondary schooling.

SB: So being bilingual led to translating?

Not immediately. I am a relative late-comer into this industry. When I left secondary school I joined Cable and Wireless who had the monopoly on overseas telecommunications. C&W had a branch in Australia, and in all British colonies, before they gave way to the OTC in Australia. In 1962 they sent me to their technical college at **Porthcurno** in Cornwall, and I spent 18 months there before returning to Mauritius to work as a telecommunications technician. In 1968 I was involved in a very severe car accident and in 1969 I went to England for advanced treatment and I eventually resigned from C&W and started a career in Computer Technology.

From England I came to Melbourne and worked in mainframe computers and then with what they called super mini computers. Later I returned to my previous preference for telecommunications when I joined Victoria Police to work in mainframe communications, before joining the Crime Department to work in Local Area Networking. When Jeff Kennett became premier of Victoria and started to privatise everything I returned to the private sector and worked for the ANZ bank in the same field of Local Area Networking.

I was short of my 60th when ANZ informed me that my position no longer existed. At that time there was a slump in information technology and finding a new job in that field was not easy. That's when I started enquiring about translation and found out about NAATI from l'Alliance Française in Melbourne and then about AUSIT. I emailed a few AUSIT members enquiring about how one "became a translator" but got no responses. Then my ex-wife sent me a paper clipping advertising Translation studies at Monash University. It was early Translation study days at Monash and eventually I came to the UWS Bankstown campus in Milperra in south-western Sydney, because they had a good track record, having been responsible for interpreting and translation during the Olympic games. The intent was to go back to Melbourne upon completion of my studies at UWS. However my wife (Josiane) and I were lucky to find this little "garden flat" to rent in East Hills. It was next to the Georges river and within 5 minutes by car from the UWS campus, . It was a delightful and memorable time; the equivalent of a little stay EN PROVENCE. During my working life I had always studied for my employers, but now I was studying for myself. At UWS I had Felicity Mueller, **Sandra Hale** and Vivian Stevenson amongst my lecturers. They are passionate about their profession and they are still active members of AUSIT. Felicity gave me the application form to join AUSIT as a student, which I did. The rest is history.

SB: OK. I know this sounds theoretical, but which is your “native” tongue?

Being Mauritian means being multicultural. In the translation field there are, as you know, domains. In the technical domain English is my first language. In the personal domain, French is my first language, and so on.

SB: You must have worked on some fascinating technical bits as a translator..

I have not done a lot of translation to date. The fascination is when the text being translated leads into research that takes you into the thinking behind the text. Sounds a bit pompous, I know, but that's what I like most about it. I will be getting back into translating again when I return from my holidays.

SB: And the Administration part?

Because we felt so much at home in Sydney, we moved there permanently. By the time I completed my Masters in Translation at UWS, we had sold our little place in Melbourne and bought an old house in Ingleburn. The thinking behind translation was that, apart from the intellectual interest, it would allow me to work for as long as I wanted and not be subject to outsourcing, down sizing etc.. In the short term I had bills to pay and I tried my luck at becoming a CCNA (Cisco Certified Network Associate) instructor. I was unable to find employment in that field and Josiane and I spent many many months doing home renovation for friends who had lots of houses they wanted to renovate and rent. Then came the job of part time administrator and I started working in that capacity at Uli Priester's office in Sydney. Eventually it became apparent that working from home was far more practical for this part time job. 2 Hours travel per day for a part time job and the fact that the phone calls interfered with the translation environment of Uli's office made working from home an obvious choice. And so I did. The trouble with working from home

is that it is part time pay but full time work and AUSIT has consumed all my hours and very little translation has occurred. What I do is labour intensive.

Still, my years as administrator have been wonderful because I have met some incredible people I would not have met otherwise. AUSIT NSW organised a farewell dinner for me in Sydney last month and **Josiane** commented about the richness of the very many unassuming, unpretentious, formidable, translators and interpreters who were there. And I would also like to mention my colleague, Bradley Dawson, who unfortunately left as well. I say unfortunately, because he is very gifted and talented, and he is still an asset to AUSIT.

SB: You must have met some wonderful and interesting people throughout the years..

Oh I could mention quite a few, but I won't, because you can't mention all. So that would be unfair. But what I would like to mention are the unsung heroes. For example, the lady who is visually impaired, can only work 20 hours a week, and is worried because revalidation might stop her pursuing her work as an interpreter. **There are many like her who provide an essential community service as well.** In her case, her physical handicap also allows her to gently admonish, in their mother tongue, those who give up too easily on the rehabilitation work required of them.

I guess in life there are those who look after number one at the expense of others, and those who look after number one full stop. And then there are the many who are very cognizant of their environment and who have the intellect and the sensitivity to know its boundaries as well as its possibilities, and whose prime motivation is not self but something else, and in the case of my unsung AUSIT heroes the something else is translation, interpreting, the profession, the community.

My unsung heroes are the gentle dignified souls who speak softly but so coherently and who have a powerful message to share.

SB: What will you remember with a smile?

I guess the young mum with her very new baby at the general meeting. In a different setting, I will always recall with a smile the mum who was explaining the ins and outs of administration to visitors whilst attending to the need of 2 very young boys, ushering in the serviceman who came to repair the washing machine, coping with translation deadline and helping run a business. It was all done with a tranquility that would make the Dalai Lama envious.

SB: Where do you see us - translators and interpreters - going in the future?

We do know about very qualified migrants who are labourers because their experience and qualifications are not recognised in Australia. It is possible that very qualified translators and interpreters may become further marginalised by the revalidation process.

And I have in mind the translator who spends "a great deal of time trying to hone my skills as a translator and first and foremost to produce high-quality translations, but not many of the activities in the logbook seem very relevant to what I actually do.....It is almost as if the whole thing is about a DIFFERENT profession. I have been translating for many years and have gathered various qualifications along the way. I did an excellent

year-long course in legal translation overseas. A great deal of time was spent on translation skills (in my university degree course overseas) ."

SB: And your future plans?

When I come back I have 2 weeks work filling in for a friend who goes on annual leave. After that I am thinking about cryo-preservation. It occurs to me that I am too far ahead of current thinking, which doesn't help. Perhaps they could bring me back into action in 10 years. It is possible **I may not go ahead with that because Josiane gave the concept a cold reception.** Plan B is translation and whatever else I can find. Perhaps I am not old enough to go into hibernation.