

**EDIBLE ETHICS**  
**THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES**  
**OF AUSTRALIA'S FOOD MEDIA**

**Samantha Mary Wight**

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## ABSTRACT

The role of food writers has changed – no longer are they concerned only with recipes and lifestyle issues. Today's food writers are faced with writing on a broad scope of topics that stretch from recipes and restaurant reviews through to health, nutrition, and social and ethical eating issues.

This study first outlines the professional role and responsibilities of food writers, and then examines the idea that, in a professional capacity, food writers are journalists. As such, food writers are faced with the responsibility of acting in the best interest of the public when they report information on food and food related issues. Yet, unlike their international colleagues, Australian food writers do not have their own code of ethics, although they do have an active professional association, the *Food Media Club of Australia*.

This study identifies the ethical dilemmas faced by the Australian food media, and looks at how they are currently dealing with issues such as accepting junkets, and the idea of food being a subjective topic. It then considers the potential consequences of unethical professional practices by food writers before recommending the development of a professional code of ethics for Australia's food media. Academic literature on the media and media ethics is considered, although there is little written specifically on the food media itself. Therefore, in order to ascertain specific insight and knowledge as well as some understanding of the current operations of Australia's food media, interviews with industry professionals and an ethics expert were conducted. Additionally, information was gathered from members of international food media associations. The various interviews revealed a common concern over the lack of information published by the food media on social and ethical food issues such as genetic modification, and sustainable agriculture. Consequently, after examining approaches used by food writers in the United Kingdom to publish such information, recommendations also include a more strident and proactive approach by the Australian food media in order to reach the general public with information that they, the food media, deem important to the future of Australian food.

## **DECLARATION**

This dissertation contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my dissertation, when deposited in the Barr Smith Library at The University of Adelaide, being made available for photocopying and loan.

Signed:

Date:

# 1 INTRODUCTION

If we were to consider the food-related information covered in Australian food magazines, lifestyle magazines, women's magazines and in newspapers, what would come to mind? Perhaps information such as how to select a ripe papaya, ten things to do with a chicken, quick mid-week food ideas, Sydney's best new restaurant, low fat desserts, luscious summer salads, how to bake a flourless cake, Tasmanian boutique beers, impressive dinner party ideas, luxury gourmet retreats, the latest kitchen gadgets, riesling – the new chardonnay, school lunchbox ideas, sea salt versus table salt, recipes from a celebrity chef, how to cook fish at home, ideas for the Easter table, meals on a budget, or best ways with asparagus. Certainly, it would be accurate to say that the bulk of Australian media pages dedicated to food are filled with such information. But, like few other topics, food touches on a multitude of issues, and when we talk about food in the twenty-first century, we are talking about far more than how to cook a leg of lamb, or what products are on the supermarket shelves. We are talking about our health, we are talking about people's livelihoods, the environment, nutrition, agriculture, globalisation, animal welfare, science, history, and about our future.

Indeed, it makes sense to say that food writing is not just about cooking and lifestyle issues. Along with lifestyle information, food writers today are faced with serious issues such as genetic modification, sustainable agriculture, biodiversity, childhood obesity, dietary deficiencies in Western society, food miles, and fair trade - a heady mix of subjects for any journalist to master. The professionals charged with writing across such a wide scope of topics are the food media - those who write about food.

The multiplication in the diversity of food-related information over recent decades, along with the increase in food magazines and media pages dedicated to food topics, has shifted the role of the food writer. No longer are food writers the lifestyle reporters they once were, reporting on little more than restaurant reviews, recipes, and food products, and providing the reader with subjective opinion and advice. Today's food writers are far more akin to mainstream journalists than ever before. They have a role of providing information to the general public – impartial, fair, honest and accurate information that the public can use to make food choices. Just like political reporters, or crime reporters, food writers are, this study will reason, another genre of journalists. Along with this professional classification comes a role of public service and responsibilities, and as such the requirement for ethical practices guided by a code of journalistic ethics. Interestingly, unlike their international colleagues in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and the United States of America, Australia's food writers do not have their own code of ethics, although they do have a professional association, the *Food Media Club of Australia*.

So, after first establishing that the scope and importance of the food writer's role has changed, this study will ask: what are the role and the responsibilities of today's food media? It will then contemplate the practice of journalistic ethics within the food media - just like mainstream journalism, the topic of ethics is often raised, amongst peer groups, academics, and amongst its consumers. In fact, by the very nature of their sometimes subjective topic, it could be argued that the food media are often faced with rather unique ethical situations that frequently render mainstream journalistic ethics irrelevant. But what constitutes ethical practices for a food writer? In order to answer this question, this study will investigate the ethical dilemmas of Australia's food media, and consider some examples of how they are currently dealing with these matters. This, along with an examination of the

potential consequences of unethical behaviour, will determine the requirement for a code of ethics for food writers in Australia.

In order to eventually form a conclusion that is practical, this study will look at the food media guilds, clubs, and associations in Australia and other countries, and their use of ethical codes and other practices in the fulfilment of their roles and responsibilities. This will assist in offering answers to the question: are there any changes that the food media or the *Food Media Club of Australia* could employ to better fulfil their role and responsibilities as food writers?

## 1.1 Methodology

Of course, there is much academic literature published on the mainstream media, media ethics, and the influence of media, but little specifically written on the food media and its role and ethical responsibilities. In the book *Remote Control – New Media, New Ethics*, Catharine Lumby and Elspeth Probyn consider journalistic ethics in new forms of media such as the internet, the fad of reality television, and the food media.<sup>1</sup> This categorisation of ‘new’ perhaps best explains the scarcity of published information on the topic. Probyn suggests that “part of the problem is that food journalism hasn’t been considered worthy of serious attention”.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the gap in information on the food media seems to lie in the examination of determining the significant role and responsibilities of food writers.

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<sup>1</sup> Catharine Lumby and Elspeth Probyn, eds. *Remote Control – New Media, New Ethics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), no page

<sup>2</sup> Elspeth Probyn, “Eating into Ethics: Passion, Food and Journalism,” in *Remote Control New Media New Ethics*, eds. Catharine Lumby and Elspeth Probyn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 110



This obviously leads to the discussion of journalistic ethics within the food media, which is also an area relatively unexamined in any comprehensive detail.

In order to fill the gaps of academic literature, and to ascertain insight and knowledge, as well as some understanding of the current ethical status of Australia's food media, several interviews were conducted for this study.<sup>3</sup> These were with:

- Rodney Dunn, Food Editor, *Australian Gourmet Traveller*
- Clare Hughes, Senior Food Policy Officer, *Choice Magazine* and *Australian Consumers' Association*
- Lyndey Milan, Food Director, *The Australian Women's Weekly*
- John Newton, Freelance Food Writer
- Gawen Rudder, Food Marketing Consultant and committee member of the *Food Media Club of Australia*
- Joanna Savill, Freelance Food Journalist and co-host of *The Food Lovers' Guide to Australia on Special Broadcasting Service Australia (SBS)*

In addition, Dr Simon Longstaff, Executive Director of the *St James Ethics Centre*, was interviewed for his expertise on ethics and professional ethical codes.

As well, members of international food media associations were contacted via e-mail in order to gain better understanding of their goals as associations, and their use of ethical codes and practices.<sup>4</sup> E-mail was exchanged with:

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<sup>3</sup> Refer Appendix 7.1: Transcript of interviews

<sup>4</sup> Refer Appendix 7.2: Copy of e-mails

- Colin Spencer, former President of the *Guild of Food Writers in the United Kingdom*
- Silvija Davidson, Chair of the Political Issues Sub-committee, *Guild of Food Writers in the United Kingdom*
- Jill Brewis, President, *New Zealand Guild of Food Writers*
- Carol DeMasters, Executive Director, *Association of Food Journalists United States of America*

In order to discuss the issues raised in this dissertation, it is important to give a clear definition of 'food media'. So, for the purposes of this study, the Australian food media are defined as those professionals who work in the realms of all print media that feature and report on food matters; this excludes literary publications, guidebooks, and cookbooks. Also, the broadcast media will not be considered in this study. Specifically the food media referred to in this study are food writers, or food journalists, and food editors who often perform the function of both writing and editing. It should be noted that there are journalists who write on a multitude of topics and will occasionally write about food – particularly on issues such as childhood obesity which frequently feature in the news sections of metropolitan papers. When this study refers to the food media it is not necessarily referring to members of the *Food Media Club of Australia*, but rather those who write about food in a professional capacity. And although this study will largely refer to people who predominantly operate and work on and with print media generated in Sydney, it is by no means irrelevant to food media working in any other area of Australia.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This includes print media that is generated in Sydney but may have a national circulation. For example food magazines, magazines with food sections, newspapers (metropolitan and suburban), and newspaper food supplements.

## 2 THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FOOD MEDIA

Defining the role of the media seems a bit rudimentary, after all anyone can ascertain that the media are there to communicate information to the public. But, at the core of their role, the media, or specifically, the journalist, has an important function. In the book, *Message Received*, Kevin Williams suggests that "journalism is simply one process of communication and knowledge provision that shapes the modern world".<sup>6</sup> In other words, journalism is, simply, a form of education. No matter what topic a journalist is reporting they are conveying information to the public.

### 2.1 The Changing Role of the Food Media

Informing the public has always been the fundamental role of the mainstream news media. But what about the food media? They are a genre of media that has grown steadily over the past few decades, not only in number, but in the scope and importance of their role. In order to understand how their role as educators and informants to the public has changed, it is necessary to take a brief look back at where food journalism has come from.

#### 2.1.1 The past

The history of the food media, or food writing to be more specific, can not be discussed without acknowledging its very early beginnings. From as far back as

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<sup>6</sup> Kevin Williams, "Teaching journalism in Britain," in *Message Received*, ed. Greg Philo (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Inc, 1999), 280

ancient Greece, writers have been dispensing advice on food. In early nineteenth century France food writing became, perhaps, a form of journalism with the likes of Grimod de la Reyniere communicating his thoughts and information on the restaurants and foods of Paris. Undoubtedly one of the most renowned pieces of gastronomic writing, *The Physiology of Taste*, was penned by Grimod's compatriot, Jean-Antheleme Brillat-Savarin in 1825.<sup>7</sup> In 1864, Australia had a taste of antipodean gastronomic writing with our first cookbook, written by Edward Abbott.<sup>8</sup> And, it was in the years following World War I that the Australian print media started to divulge "the latest findings about the effects of food on the body".<sup>9</sup> This was when the food media in Australia began the journalistic role of providing "a public service".<sup>10</sup> They continued this role between the two World Wars when nutritional facts provided by Government organisations dominated the food information relayed by the media.<sup>11</sup>

The mid-twentieth century was a time for the food media to fill the minds of consumers with ideas to better their lifestyles and improve their health, ideas on what to feed the children, how to hold a dinner party for the husband's boss, and how to set the table for any occasion, along with the etiquette involved in the process – what to wear, where to seat guests, and what wine to serve with a prawn cocktail. At this time the world was also able to savour the words of renowned food writers such as Elizabeth David, and MK Fisher. Australian women's magazines in

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<sup>7</sup> Jean-Antheleme Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste*, trans. Anne Drayton (London: Penguin, 1994), no page

<sup>8</sup> Abbott, Edward, *The English and Australian Cookery Book* (London: Sampson Low, Son and Marston, 1864), no page

<sup>9</sup> John Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning: The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating* (London: Routledge, 2000), 169

<sup>10</sup> *Ethics in Journalism: Report by Australian Journalists' Association Ethics Review Committee, Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1997), 5

<sup>11</sup> Coveney, 104

this era were encouraging the use of “manufactured foods”, promoting their convenience and efficiency to the housewife.<sup>12</sup> As food historian Barbara Santich notes in *What the Doctors Ordered*, an article in the “*Women’s Weekly* of April 1960 demonstrated how...packaged, ready-mix foods...enable the modern housewife to serve her family appetising meals with a minimum of time and effort”.<sup>13</sup>

Without doubt, as American food writer Ruth Reichl says, for much of the twentieth century food writing was “seen as ‘women’s page’ stuff”.<sup>14</sup> In short, the food media were lifestyle commentators, with some consideration of nutritional information distributed often on behalf of Government organisations, along with the latest news in kitchen technology, manufactured foods, and appealing recipes. At the time, this certainly provided the reader with desired and necessary information. Of course, we are speaking of a time before issues such as genetic modification, trans-fat, organics, and *Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (BSE)* were concerns, before food became assimilated into pop-culture, generating countless glossy magazines, weekly newspaper supplements, and an abundance of television programs all dedicated to eating and drinking well.

### 2.1.2 The role of today’s food media

As science has advanced so have our food choices - agriculture has improved with better technology, so has food manufacturing, food safety, and also food

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<sup>12</sup> Coveney, 133

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Santich, *What the Doctors Ordered* (South Melbourne: Hyland House Publishing, 1995), 132

<sup>14</sup> Doug Brown, “Haute Cuisine: food journalism,” in *American Journalism Review*, v26 il, (Feb.-Mar. 2004), [on-line]; accessed 7 Sept. 2005; available from [https://myuni.adelaide.edu.au/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab\\_id=\\_110\\_1,2](https://myuni.adelaide.edu.au/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_id=_110_1,2)

transportation. And, like no other time in history, these scientific advances have provided us with an abundance of new information on what we eat and how we should eat, including where we can purchase food, how we should store and prepare it, how to choose our food, what the dangers are in eating it, how it will affect our bodies, where the food has come from, and how it is processed. This immeasurable amount of information has given Australians, indeed Western society, an appetite for more and more information on food in order to make better, informed decisions on what foods we choose to consume. "Information about food and health," says Anne Keane in *Consuming Passions - Food in the Age of Anxiety*, "is a key contemporary issue".<sup>15</sup>

This is where the role of the food media comes in to play in the twenty-first century. Warren Belasco, a professor at the *University of Maryland*, describes the role of food media "as the handmaiden to consumer culture, helping people refine their choices, being more expert as consumers, more discriminating".<sup>16</sup> Again, the food media, like other media, have a role in providing information to the public. This role has possibly not changed much over the decades, rather it is the type of information, or the increase in the variety of information they report that has changed. And, as such, the importance of the role and responsibilities of the food media has intensified. Food writers now write across a scope of issues that stretch from the provision of recipes and cooking tips through to health issues, social and ethical eating matters. It is no longer unusual to see articles about food in the news section of the newspapers, and to see something other than recipes in the food sections of women's magazines, or even the food supplements to metropolitan newspapers. As previously mentioned, some food writers are journalists who write

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<sup>15</sup> Anne Keane, "Too hard to swallow? The palatability of healthy eating advice," in *Food in the Age of Anxiety*, ed. Pat Caplan (London: Routledge, 1997),180

<sup>16</sup> Brown, 3

on topics other than food, and often these are the people whose food-related articles appear in the editorial supplements to newspapers, such as *Spectrum* in the Saturday edition of *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

### 2.1.3 Food writers as journalists

Through the course of the interviews with the food media undertaken for this study, matters such as who should be writing about food, and the role of the food media were discussed. Within these conversations, the question of whether food writers should be professionally equated with mainstream journalists was deliberated.

This was not to ascertain whether or not food writers should call themselves writers or journalists, because the job title is irrelevant. Instead, the conversations centred on whether or not today's food writers have a similar role and set of responsibilities as mainstream journalists. This is an important consideration because it means that food writers should, theoretically, operate under the same or similar ethical codes as mainstream journalists. Self-titled food writer John Newton says "I am a writer more than a journalist...I have never called myself a journalist because I don't write for the front of the paper..."<sup>17</sup> Offering a different opinion, self-titled food journalist Joanna Savill says:

I won't call myself a food writer, I call myself a food journalist and it might sound pathetic, but...I really feel strongly [about this] because writer – the word almost implies subjectivity, whereas the word journalist implies objectivity.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> John Newton, Recorded interview with author, 19 July 2005, unpaginated

<sup>18</sup> Joanna Savill, Recorded interview with author, 1 December 2005, unpaginated

Although, it is not reporting headline news, or even practising objectivity, that defines a writer as a professional journalist. As the preamble to the *Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) Code of Ethics* outlines:

Journalists describe society itself...they convey information, ideas and opinions, a privileged role...they search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember...they inform citizens and animate democracy.<sup>19</sup>

This description of a journalist, on all accounts, seems to sum up the role of today's food media.

It is interesting that Joanna Savill raises the issue of objectivity, because this is almost a mantra amongst mainstream journalists. So, the fact that many food writers insist food is a subjective topic is, perhaps, a bit contentious. When journalistic ethics are discussed later in this paper, objectivity will be examined in further detail. Interestingly, in *The Media and Communications in Australia*, Catharine Lumby talks of the common categorisation of news being either "hard" or "soft".<sup>20</sup> "Hard news" she says "is important, serious, objective, authoritative, investigative, informative and factual" whereas "soft news is, at best, merely entertaining".<sup>21</sup> The distinguishing factor, Lumby explains, is that "hard news...delivers information of great public interest".<sup>22</sup> With this point in mind, it is worth noting Elspeth Probyn's observation that "within the media themselves, there is a distinct lack of regard for food journalism...food journalists are considered

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<sup>19</sup> *Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance*, [on-line]; accessed 30 Sept. 2005; available from <http://www.alliance.org.au/content/view/17/60/>

<sup>20</sup> Catharine Lumby, "The Future of Journalism," in *The Media and Communications in Australia*, eds. Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner (Crows Nest: Allen Unwin, 2002), 322

<sup>21</sup> Lumby, *The Future of Journalism*, 322

<sup>22</sup> Lumby, *The Future of Journalism*, 322



'soft'...after all, they don't report the facts, they give opinions".<sup>23</sup> During an interview for this study, Joanna Savill agreed with Probyn's statement, and the reason she says "is quite simple – it comes down to the fact that there isn't the same professional approach across the board to food writing".<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless if a journalist was to be defined solely on the type of news they report, that is hard news as opposed to soft news, then food writers should be considered journalists – because food writing today very often encompasses the reporting of unbiased, factual information that is, increasingly, positioned towards the front page of the newspaper, or given feature status in a newspaper's food or editorial supplements. On this subject, Dr Simon Longstaff, Executive Director of the *St James Ethics Centre*, comments.<sup>25</sup>

I think that to the extent that food writers now include such a broad range of people who are writing about nutrition, animal husbandry, marketing, symbolism - all of these sociological issues - they definitely need to see themselves as either journalists who report, or journalists who comment and they should be bound by the same obligations.<sup>26</sup>

Whether or not members of the food media choose to use the term writer or journalist does not matter, rather it is the acceptance of the definition of their role and responsibilities that is important. It should be noted that the term food writer is

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<sup>23</sup> Probyn, *Eating into Ethics*, 110

<sup>24</sup> Savill, unpaginated

<sup>25</sup> *St James Ethics Centre*, [on-line]; accessed 26 Oct. 2005; available from: <http://www.ethics.org.au>

"St James Ethics Centre is a fully independent not-for-profit organisation that works with business, professions, community groups, governments and individuals to encourage and assist them to include the ethical dimension in their daily lives".

<sup>26</sup> Simon Longstaff, Recorded interview with author, 26 Nov. 2005, unpaginated

universal and will persist, regardless of any acknowledgement or acceptance of the professional description. As Longstaff says, to suggest that food writers are anything other than journalists suggests that they “would be excused from the kind of ethical obligations that journalists are formally required to uphold”.<sup>27</sup> They should be classified as journalists if “they are going to write anything other than restaurant reviews...if they pick up their pencils to write about anything else, then they are a journalist,” says Longstaff.<sup>28</sup>

#### **2.1.4 The responsibilities of a journalist**

Strictly speaking, journalism is not truly a profession, but according to Simon Longstaff of the *St James Ethics* Centre that does not mean journalists are not considered to be professionals in the sense that they are bound by ethical responsibilities. He explains:

It is equally true that journalists will often say to themselves that they are members of a profession and...if you move into a profession then two things happen: first of all you are obliged, if you take it seriously, always to act in the spirit of public service – that is the interests of yourself, your employer and a whole lot of other people have to be subordinated to what is in the interests of society...the second thing that comes from being a member of a profession is that there is almost always some defining purpose that you serve - journalists, well they are supposed to seek the truth, so before you even get to any codification of rules, there’s a kind of cultural context, or sub-cultural context to the professional life within which you act in the spirit of public service and the pursuit of a defining good.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Longstaff, unpaginated

<sup>28</sup> Longstaff, unpaginated

<sup>29</sup> Longstaff, unpaginated

Essentially, a person does not need to be in a traditional profession in order to be bound by a responsibility of ethical behaviour. Rather, once it is established that their occupation is faced with having to act in the best interests of the public, they are then faced with having to deal with ethics and the need to ascertain how to deal with ethical dilemmas that may interfere with or hinder their duty to the public. So, as journalists, this would mean that the food media have a role to provide the public with impartial, fair, honest and accurate information on all food-related issues. In the process of fulfilling this role they are faced with the responsibilities of acting in the best interest of the consumers, the food industry, and their employers or the publications for which they write. This means dealing with ethical dilemmas that might interfere with their role.

## **2.2 Message Sent – the Information Reported by the Food Media**

Certainly, today's food media report a combination of both "soft" and "hard news" to the public.<sup>30</sup> In order to later discuss the food media's responsibilities, it is important to fully understand the scope of information which they report on in the course of fulfilling their role. By categorising this information and providing current examples from the Australian food media, it will allow a better understanding of the core areas of information reported by the food media.

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<sup>30</sup> Lumby, *The Future of Journalism*, 322

## 2.2.1 Health and nutrition issues

As previously ascertained, the role of reporting and featuring nutritional information, or information on healthy eating is something that food writers have been doing for decades. Information on health and nutrition is increasingly desired by consumers, be it about diets, health risks, public health warnings and hazards, nutritional content of foods, or food labelling. In *Food, Morals and Meaning – the pleasure and anxiety of eating*, John Coveney suggests this escalation of interest is partly due to today's food media simplifying nutritional information to make it easier for the public to digest.<sup>31</sup> He explains that "this process transforms a complex science like nutrition into a product of sheer entertainment; one which finds its place in magazines, newspapers and popular TV programmes".<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, there are entire magazines dedicated to helping consumers make healthy and nutritional food choices, such as *Australian Healthy Food* which was new to the market in late 2005. It covers issues such as *The Best Fats and Oils for Your Health*, or *ADHD – Can Food Cause Hyperactivity?*<sup>33</sup> Generally, though, neither nutritional or health issues are addressed in the glossy food magazines like *Vogue Entertaining and Travel*, and it seems that one of the most popular forums for this type of reporting remains women's magazines. For example *The Australian Women's Weekly* runs a monthly page titled *Eatright* that carries information on issues such as calcium and the importance of eating dairy foods.<sup>34</sup> They also offer nutritional information in the *Parenthood* page which occasionally offers advice on issues like "your baby's first food".<sup>35</sup> Childhood obesity is currently a very

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<sup>31</sup> Coveney, 169

<sup>32</sup> Coveney, 169

<sup>33</sup> *Australian Healthy Food*, Dec. 2005, cover page

<sup>34</sup> Karen Inge, "Eatright," in *The Australian Women's Weekly*, Aug. 2005, 177

<sup>35</sup> Robin Barker, "Parenthood," in *The Australian Women's Weekly*, Aug. 2005, 181

contemporary topic in the media – being reported widely, and mainly in the news sections of newspapers, although it has certainly been addressed in the health and nutrition sections of some women’s magazines

*Choice Magazine* is another publication that devotes a substantial amount of space to food matters concerned with health and nutrition. Clare Hughes, Senior Food Policy Officer of the *Australian Consumer’s Association (ACA)* which publishes *Choice Magazine*, notes that although they are not a magazine dedicated to food, it is regularly featured in their pages, and she explains “when we survey our subscribers, consistently, of the top five issues they tell us they are interested in comes nutrition, food safety, and food labelling.<sup>36</sup> Catering to their readers’ requests, *Choice* runs articles such as *Low Carb – But Highly Processed*, or *Bottled Water – A Triumph of Marketing*.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.2.2 Product information

General information on foodstuffs is a form of product information. *Choice Magazine* devotes a fair bit of space to this type of reporting, often publishing reports that consider the best in a selection of food products. For example an article on shortbread biscuits compared twenty brands of biscuits, providing information on their butter content, price and ingredients.<sup>38</sup> Product information in food magazines is often the result of marketing or paid media placement and advertorials devised by public relations or advertising agencies working for food

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<sup>36</sup> Clare Hughes, Recorded interview with author, 17 Oct. 2005, unpaginated

<sup>37</sup> “Low Carb – but Highly Effective,” in *Choice Magazine*, Aug. 2005, 20  
“Bottled Water – A Triumph of Marketing?,” in *Choice Magazine*, July 2005, 8

<sup>38</sup> “Short and Sweet,” in *Choice Magazine*, July 2005, 32

producers or manufacturers. This is clearly the case with *The Australian Women's Weekly* page, *Food News*, where information about new food products and general news is released. The products, though, are clearly those of *Weekly* advertisers. For example an editorial column that provides a recipe for *Penne Carbonara* and talks of the recent travels of Chef Darren Simpson and his visit to the *Barilla* pasta headquarters in Italy, precedes, by five pages, a two-page advertisement for *Barilla*<sup>39</sup>. This practice is also evident in other food magazines such as *Australian Table*, *Super Food Ideas*, and *Australian Good Taste*.

### 2.2.3 Skill-related information

Skill related information fills a large component of food pages in the media. It may include recipes, product use ideas, and cooking instructions. Food Director of *The Australian Women's Weekly*, Lyndey Milan, says "our philosophy is to teach people to cook, and that is what the *Women's Weekly* has always done", which is why the pages she is responsible for are filled with recipes.<sup>40</sup> They also provide product use ideas to assist people to save time when cooking, and thus encouraging them into the kitchen. Other food magazines such as *Australian Good Taste*, and Australia's highest circulated food magazine, *Super Food Ideas*, provide similar information to readers. In fact, a flick through the food pages of just about any major metropolitan newspaper, food magazine, or women's magazine, or even lifestyle magazines such as *Notebook* or *Better Homes and Gardens*, illustrates the point that the provision of skill-related information certainly accounts for a bulk of the media pages dedicated to food.

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<sup>39</sup> "Italian Experience," in *The Australian Women's Weekly*, Aug. 2005, 218

<sup>40</sup> Lyndey Milan, Recorded interview with author, 28 July 2005, unpaginated

#### 2.2.4 Ethical and social eating issues

Some food related topics touch on emerging issues that may be confronting and controversial. For example, information on biodiversity, genetic modification, effects of globalisation on sustainable farming, fair trade, or humane eating practices such as vegetarianism. For the most part, these are issues that could really allow a food writer to practice the skill of research and provide the reader with a balanced and impartial story. It is surprising then, that the food media seem to shy away from these more controversial topics. Yes, certainly there are some articles and information published on such matters, but very rarely in food magazines – particularly the glossy publications such as *Vogue Entertaining and Travel* or *Delicious* - and usually only in the supplements of metropolitan newspapers such as *the Sydney Morning Herald's Good Living*, or even in editorial supplements such as a feature on the endangered Patagonian Toothfish in *Good Weekend*.<sup>41</sup> Women's magazines *New Idea* and *Family Circle* are possibly the only two in their genre that have touched on genetic modification. Although topics such as organics, which are perhaps less controversial, are more commonly covered by the food media, but rarely with much detail or substance.

It is worth mentioning at this point that, despite the lack of articles on such information, at the *Adelaide Food Summit* in October 2005 the Australian food media along with food industry leaders, scientists, and researchers, discussed the future of food.<sup>42</sup> During the *Summit* all of these participants signed the *Declaration of Adelaide* outlining their "concerns about the future of food in Australia".<sup>43</sup> Matters flagged by the *Declaration* would mostly fall into this category of social or

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<sup>41</sup> *Good Weekend*, The Sydney Morning Herald, 26 Nov. 2005

<sup>42</sup> Refer Appendix 7.3: Declaration of Adelaide

<sup>43</sup> Gawen Rudder, "Declaration of Adelaide on the Future of Food," in *Food Media Club Australia Update*, (Dec. 2005-Jan. 2006), 1

ethical eating issues or into health and nutrition, but included sustainable agriculture, “new technologies associated with food” such as genetic modification, and childhood obesity.<sup>44</sup> Interestingly this event, which certainly has the potential to influence the Australian food industry and what Australian’s are encouraged to eat, received no mention in Sydney’s metropolitan newspapers or their food supplements.

### 2.2.5 Lifestyle information

The glossy food magazines such as *Vogue Entertaining and Travel*, *Australian Gourmet Traveller*, *Delicious*, and *Donna Hay* are filled with information to assist in enhancing our lifestyles - topics such as entertaining, gastro-travel, table decorations, or ‘what’s hot and what’s not’ are all popular. Restaurant reviews may also fall into this category as well as into the product information category. Food Editor of *Australian Gourmet Traveller*, Rodney Dunn, says that this type of information is a staple for his publication because their agenda is to “set trends”.<sup>45</sup> Proving his point is the *Gourmet News* section of this magazine which reports on new food products, celebrity chefs, and carries headlines such as *The Very Old Fashioned Fish Knife is Back – as Heritage Chic*, proclaiming the latest trends in food accessories.<sup>46</sup> This section of *Australian Gourmet Traveller* also features a “gastro temple” each month, declaring their latest find of one of the “world’s must-dine-in restaurants”.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Rudder, *Declaration of Adelaide on the Future of Food*, 1

<sup>45</sup> Rodney Dunn. Recorded interview with author, 19 July 2005, unpaginated

<sup>46</sup> “Gourmet News,” in *Australian Gourmet Traveller*, Nov. 2005, 21

<sup>47</sup> *Australian Gourmet Traveller*, Nov. 2005, 22



### 2.3 Distributors of Information

This study has established that the chief role of the food media is to provide impartial, fair, honest and accurate consumer information to the public; but where do they obtain their information from, or their ideas for articles? Obviously, many food-related articles are instigated by food writers or editors, and as such are the result of independent research. But because of the food media's perceived influence and effectiveness of getting information to the public, they have long been used as a reliable source of reporting messages to the community. As John Coveney notes, today's "media continues to play an important role in distributing knowledge about food".<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the media may receive information to report from various sources like health professionals, government bodies, small businesses, food manufacturers, or academics. Such information may be received by the media in the form of press releases, phone calls, or media conferences attended by the food media, or it may be the result of a public awareness campaign, or perhaps marketing by the source.

In *Scaremonger or Scapegoat? The Role of the Media in the Emergence of Food as a Social Issue*, Jacquie Reilly and David Miller note that "news sources increasingly recognise the value of planning media strategies".<sup>49</sup> Indeed there are many of these "news sources" contending to get their message conveyed to the masses by the food media, and some will spend considerable dollars to do so, while others, such as Government bodies, are utilising the media to fulfil their own duty of public service.<sup>50</sup> So, in order to further understand the mechanics of the food media's role, and to discuss their responsibilities and ethical dilemmas, it must

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<sup>48</sup> Coveney, 115

<sup>49</sup> David Miller and Jacquie Reilly, "Scaremonger or scapegoat? The Role of the Media in the Emergence of Food as a Social Issue," in *Food, Health and Identity*, ed. Pat Caplan (London: Routledge, 1997), 235

<sup>50</sup> Miller and Reilly, 235

first be acknowledged that these sources regularly use the food media to distribute messages. They can affect the ethical functioning of the food media on many levels, not only because some of these sources have considerable power with editors due to their significant advertising revenue, but also because they can offer the food media attractive and persuasive enticements in order to have a message published. This is an important point to note when talking about ethical behaviour, particularly the provision of accurate information to consumers and avoiding any conflicts of interest.

## 2.4 Consumers' Rights to Information

When defining the role and responsibilities of the food media, it is necessary to consider the public's right to information. Integral to the food media's role is the provision of information that readers have a right to read, not just as consumers, but as citizens. Clare Hughes, Senior Food Policy Officer for *Australian Consumers' Society* and *Choice Magazine*, believes consumers have the right to honest information about food that is released in a "responsible way".<sup>51</sup> Whether it be a public health issue, or product information, Hughes adds that "disclosure is what is going to protect the (food) industry and the government" as well as provide rightful and often necessary information to the consumers.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, journalists must, at all times, consider the consumers – this is certainly an integral part of any journalist's role, and is mentioned in most journalistic codes of ethics.

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<sup>51</sup> Hughes, unpaginated

<sup>52</sup> Hughes, unpaginated

Undeniably, the role of today's food media has increased over the past few decades as food writers have progressed to report on a multitude of topics. In fact, it is this array of topics that has redefined the importance and the scope of their role, and classified the food writer and anyone who operates in such a capacity as a journalist. As such, food writers are faced with a task of fulfilling a role of public service, and providing the consumer with information on food and food related issues that is fair, honest and accurate. In doing so, they may also entertain us, help us to eat better food, improve our lifestyles, and increase our knowledge. Crucially, food writers have a responsibility to carry out their role in an ethical manner that ensures they are considering the best interests of the public at all times. They must also display consideration to their profession, their employers, and to the food industry in which they operate.

### 3 THE ETHICAL DILEMMAS OF TODAY'S FOOD MEDIA

Media ethics are often discussed, debated and dissected by consumer advocates, academics, and consumers themselves. Words such as unbiased, impartial, fair and responsible are mentioned, and more and more it seems, journalists are being scrutinised for unethical behaviour. Due to their responsibility to the public this scrutiny is probably just, but what exactly constitutes ethical journalistic practices, specifically when it comes to the food media? In order to answer this question it is necessary to first look briefly at a definition of ethics itself.

#### 3.1 Ethics

Perhaps ethics has something to do with choosing between what is right and what is wrong, but ethics really involves a more complex definition. The *St James Ethics Centre* in Australia says that the philosophy of ethics stems from the question asked in Ancient Greece by Socrates, "what ought one do?", and the answers that flow from this are what constitute the realm of ethics.<sup>53</sup> This question does not ask for definitive answers, rather it is "an immensely practical question that confronts people whenever they have a decision to make, whenever they are in a position to exercise their capacity to choose".<sup>54</sup> Essentially, ethics is about evaluating situations and about making choices and decisions that may not necessarily always be clearly right or wrong. These types of decisions are faced on a regular basis by professionals in many occupations like medical practitioners, accountants, and journalists.

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<sup>53</sup> St. James Ethics Centre, [on-line]

<sup>54</sup> St. James Ethics Centre, [on-line]

### 3.1.1 The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance<sup>55</sup>

To promote ethical practices, the media in numerous countries have established ethical codes, usually different for print and broadcast media, and occasionally for different genres of journalism. In fact many media corporations, such as *John Fairfax Holdings Limited*, publishers of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, have their own set of ethical guidelines. These codes are a form of “self regulation” for journalists and aim to give answers to the ethical dilemmas they may come across in the course of doing their jobs.<sup>56</sup> Such codes also give a profession principles and values to judge themselves against, and they declare to the public the type of behaviour the journalism profession supports, and the type that it discourages.<sup>57</sup>

In Australia, the *Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA)* offers its journalist members a *Code of Ethics*.<sup>58</sup> The *MEAA* sees their *Code of Ethics* as “a statement by members to the public of the ethical considerations which will guide them in their activities on behalf of keeping the public informed”.<sup>59</sup> In a summary of their *Code of Ethics*, the *MEAA* states:

Many journalists work in private enterprise, but all have these public responsibilities. They scrutinise power, but they also exercise it, and should be accountable. Accountability engenders trust. Without trust, journalists do not fulfil their public responsibilities. *MEAA* members engaged in journalism commit

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<sup>55</sup> In 1993 the Australian Journalists' Association (AJA) amalgamated with the Australian Theatrical and Amusement Employees' Association and the Actors' Equity of Australia to form the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA). The MEAA operates partly as a trade union, and also as a professional association for Australian journalists.

<sup>56</sup> *Ethics in Journalism*, xi

<sup>57</sup> *Ethics in Journalism*, 1

<sup>58</sup> Refer Appendix 7.4: MEAA Code of Ethics

<sup>59</sup> *Ethics in Journalism*, 2

themselves to: Honesty, Fairness, Independence, Respect for the rights of others...<sup>60</sup>

This *Code* provides Australian journalists with guidelines in ethical behaviour such as conflicts of interest, or “advertising or other commercial considerations” affecting “accuracy, fairness or independence”.<sup>61</sup>

### 3.1.2 Ethics in the twenty-first century

In their book *Remote Control - New Media, New Ethics*, Lumby and Probyn acknowledge that ethical codes “are often derided or ignored by journalists” because the codes “fail to take account of the realities and complexities of popular media practice”.<sup>62</sup> Undeniably, a broad spectrum code such as that of the *MEAA* stands in danger of overlooking the unique ethical dilemmas sometimes faced by the food media.

## 3.2 Different Ethics?

Probyn asserts that “few people outside of food journalism would even think to apply journalistic ethical standards to a branch of the media that trades in opinion”.<sup>63</sup> She contends that this is partly because of “the presumed passivity and gender of its audience”.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps, though, it is due to the perceived insignificance

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<sup>60</sup> *Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance*, [on-line]

<sup>61</sup> *Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance*, [on-line]

<sup>62</sup> Lumby and Probyn, 2

<sup>63</sup> Probyn, *Eating Into Ethics*, 110

<sup>64</sup> Probyn, *Eating Into Ethics*, 109

of the topics covered by the food media? In truth, “opinion” is something that mainstream media also commonly “trade in” everyday.<sup>65</sup> In any case when the topic of ethics is raised in the presence of a food media professional, most will immediately jump straight to the debate of objective versus subjective reporting, or they might mention the proverbial free lunch. In actual fact, though, the food media’s ethical dilemmas have grown beyond the debate of food being subjective, and the seemingly persistent culture of freebies or junkets – these dilemmas now involve the food media’s power and influence, and their responsibilities to consumers, duty to their profession, duty to the food industry, and to their employers.

### **3.2.1 Reporting the facts...or not? Objectivity and the food media**

Can a food journalist write objectivity? That is, can they report on something without bringing any preconceived ideas or prejudices into their writing? In mainstream journalism objectivity is considered to be a top priority, but food journalism say Lumby and Probyn “is one of the last bastions where certain unacceptable forms of subjective closeness are still practiced”.<sup>66</sup> But, is it possible to write objectively on a subject that, by its very nature, is subjective? After all, when we consume food we usually do so subjectively, considering our likes and dislikes and our past experiences. During an interview for this study, food writer John Newton commented:

I think that [being objective when writing about food] is nonsense...how can you be unbiased about a product that you are writing about which is consumed and

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<sup>65</sup> Probyn, *Eating Into Ethics*, 110

<sup>66</sup> Lumby and Probyn, 6

becomes a part of you? I don't understand that...you can't be an objective food journalist – it doesn't make sense".<sup>67</sup>

Maybe it is also the passion and closeness that many food writers have with their subject that makes it difficult to imagine impartiality? Nevertheless, Lyndey Milan believes that "it is our role to present the facts in an unemotional way to our readers and then leave them to make up their own mind...it's not up to us".<sup>68</sup>

Possibly the dilemma of objectivity is most apparent for the food critic.<sup>69</sup> Like other food writers, food critics need to communicate information to the public, but their specific role is to offer their analysis and assessment, and to provide the reader with information that will assist the decisions on what and where they will eat. In fact, this ethical dilemma lies in the crux of the food critic's role, which is to provide information that has been somewhat garnered by their own opinion, therefore making some aspects of a restaurant review subjective. Simon Longstaff elaborates:

There is a lot about food that is not subjective which is part of the critic's task to report; if someone promises a hot meal and you get a cold one, its late, the wine was off and no one cared – these are all matters that any objective observer could note and should note in their report...it is also true to say that there is an element to a judgement of what constitutes a good meal, which is a matter of taste – literally, and to that extent, food is subjective.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Newton, Recorded interview with author, unpaginated

<sup>68</sup> Milan, unpaginated

<sup>69</sup> Probyn, *Eating into Ethics*, 112

<sup>70</sup> Longstaff, unpaginated



Certainly, most food writing should be objective, still it seems there is an almost unavoidable element of subjectivity attached to food, most particularly in restaurant reviews; this predicament is an ethical dilemma faced by the food media yet is not directly addressed by any existing journalistic code of ethics in Australia.

### 3.2.2 The ethical issues of the food critic

In addition to the sometimes unavoidable subjectivity of restaurant reviews, the food critic who might also practice as a food writer could potentially face another grey ethical area. For instance, if a food critic becomes well known to readers as a critic – someone who writes subjectively, and with some witty embellishment – but then, on occasion wants to write about other objective food issues, they are possibly doing themselves and their readers an injustice. Simon Longstaff reasons that the well-known critic who performs both tasks on a regular basis “effectively disqualifies themselves from being taken seriously when they write about these other things”.<sup>71</sup> He elaborates, “you can’t say I am a little bit cavalier when I am writing a review, but I am really serious when I am doing something on these other issues.”<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, fulfilling the dual role of both writer and critic is not uncommon in Australia where work for food critics is perhaps more limited than in Europe. If the job of the critic is done ethically, then performing both tasks is possibly not a problem.

In his article, *Fare Comment*, critiquing the state of Sydney’s food criticism, John Newton says that the “the purpose of today’s restaurant criticism... [is] to pick

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<sup>71</sup> Longstaff, unpaginated

<sup>72</sup> Longstaff, unpaginated

trends, create stars or destroy lives".<sup>73</sup> Indeed, it is not unusual to enjoy a laugh over a clever joke in a restaurant review, jokes that are usually at the expense of the food or the restaurant being reviewed. But, is this type of writing ethical - especially in consideration of the *MEAA* code that states "do not...give distorting emphasis"?<sup>74</sup> Undoubtedly food critics and food writers need to report in an entertaining fashion, so perhaps restaurant criticism can be a bit of both. After all who wants to read a dull dialogue that lacks character? Witty and entertaining, though, can cross the line to become unethical if the critic fails to exercise 'fair comment' and starts to defame the restaurant. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

Another interesting statement that Newton makes in *Fare Comment* is:

The restaurant critic is above all criticism...especially if, as is often the case, their covers are blown when, depending on the power of the critic, the entire kitchen brigade will concentrate on the critic's meal.<sup>75</sup>

If a food critic is known well enough for Newton's scenario to occur, how can the critic possibly deliver an honest review to the public? How can they be sure that the food they are getting is the same as everyone else in the restaurant? This was a situation discussed at a recent panel of Sydney food critics where the topic *Food Critics – Wankers, Wafflers or Wannabe Chefs* was debated.<sup>76</sup> One of the panellists, Simon Marnie, broadcast journalist for *Australian Broadcasting*

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<sup>73</sup> John Newton, "Fare Comment," in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 29, 2004. [on-line]; accessed 7 June 2005, available from <http://www.smh.com.au/cgi-bin/common/popupPrintArticle.pl?path=articles/2004/05/>, 4

<sup>74</sup> MEAA, [on-line]

<sup>75</sup> Newton, *Fare Comment*, 2

<sup>76</sup> Panel of food critics John Newton, Helen Greenwood and Simon Marnie. Moderated by Samantha Wight at The Sydney Mechanics Institute of the Arts, held in conjunction with *Good Food Week*, 20 October 2005.

*Corporation (ABC) Radio* and television host on the *Lifestyle Channel*, revealed that he has stopped working as a restaurant critic for this very reason. He explained that he noticed he was increasingly recognised in restaurants, and therefore felt he could not guarantee a fair and honest review to the readers. Conversely, Lyndey Milan, who has been reviewing restaurants longer than anyone else in Sydney, starting with the *Good Food Guide* in 1987, believes that although she is a well-known face within the food industry, she practices enough discretion when reviewing a restaurant:

What I usually do is, the person who I am going with, I get them to ring and book in their name...once you get there, yes they can change your table, they can change the service, but they can't change the menu and they can't change the quality of food, and they can't change the wine list...and you [the reviewer] should be savvy enough not to be seduced and should be absolutely savvy enough to be able to see what's happening at other tables.<sup>77</sup>

There are at least a couple of dozen food critics in Sydney, and they write for newspapers, and magazines such as *Vogue Entertaining and Travel and Australian Gourmet Traveller*, and restaurant guides such as *Sydney Eats*, and *The Good Food Guide*. But considering all of these critics, only very few have profiles that are high enough to attract instant recognition. Indeed, it is well discussed within the food media that Sydney has only one major, influential food critic, Matthew Evans, who writes for *The Sydney Morning Herald*. After recently featuring in a television series *Heat in the Kitchen* about Sydney restaurants and food critics, Evans is undeniably a well-known face around the City's restaurant industry.<sup>78</sup> So, the question is a valid one – if you are recognised as a food critic when you dine in a

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<sup>77</sup> Milan, unpaginated

<sup>78</sup> In December 2005, Matthew Evans resigned after five years as chief restaurant reviewer for *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

restaurant you intend to review, can you give a fair and honest review? Simon Longstaff has some rather strong views on this ethical dilemma:

It is not enough, I think, to say that you can be the well-known foodie around town and just sit down at a restaurant and expect that what you will be served the common fare [that will be fed to others]. And that's what goes to the heart of what a review is about, I don't want to read a review of what was the one and only special meal that was cooked in the kitchen in the past fortnight, because that betrays my reason for reading it...I have to rely upon the fact that the service experienced, the food eaten, had all been prepared on the assumption that whoever has been reviewing was just an ordinary punter. So then, any critic under these circumstances who thinks that they can continue to discharge their function that they promise to the public...is, I think, deceiving themselves and ultimately they are engaging in deceptive conduct.<sup>79</sup>

The ethical dilemmas of a food critic can not be discussed without mention of free meals. In Sydney, this type of kickback is most noticeable in the suburban newspapers. Most of the *Cumberland Press* suburban newspapers publish weekly reviews of local restaurants and only in early 2005 did they begin to discreetly label them as advertorial. These are the restaurant reviews of the no-criticism variety that are, so obviously, the result of the reviewer's free meal. In fact, in the case of *Cumberland Press* newspapers, they are also the result of the restaurant buying an advertising package from the newspaper. They are, perhaps, only slightly more ethical than the favourable reviews given in return for nothing more than a free meal. Both Newton and Milan talked freely about their contempt for food media members who display such unethical behaviour and accept free meals in return for reviews, and they acknowledged that this practice does persist amongst some

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<sup>79</sup> Longstaff, unpaginated

people who consider themselves food writers or critics. But, as Milan puts it “you can never write about something that you have accepted for nothing...and that is what people need to understand”.<sup>80</sup>

### **3.2.3 No such thing as a free lunch?**

So there is such a thing, literally, as a free lunch or a free meal within the realms of the food media, but it is not a practice generally accepted amongst peers. It is not only free meals that are offered to the food media, but free travel, and free food products – and often in return for favourable editorial or publicity. The dilemma of accepting freebies is not one that is unique to the food media. In fact, it is an issue that is clearly addressed in most ethical codes for mainstream journalists such as that of the *MEAA* which asserts “do not allow personal interest, or any belief, commitment, payment, gift or benefit, to undermine your accuracy, fairness or independence”.<sup>81</sup> It is, though, a practice that is considered to be rife amongst both the travel media and the food media. Food journalist Joanna Savill talks of the “culture shock” that she faced when she left mainstream reporting to concentrate on food:

I discovered this whole new world to me, absolutely whole new world – I had never, ever come across it – and I was a serious news reporter for several years at SBS, and they are very, very stringent about their research and your impartiality and all that stuff...and all of a sudden people are saying ‘would you like to go to Singapore for a trip?’, and your going ‘yeah’, and then you say ‘no strings attached though’.

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<sup>80</sup> Milan, unpaginated

<sup>81</sup> Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, [on-line]

Then when you come back, they would say 'where are you writing, what have you published, what are you doing?'<sup>82</sup>

So is acceptance of freebies and junkets ethical? Even if the journalist makes a point not to generate editorial as a result? After all, it is probably acceptable for the public relations and advertising agencies, and even smaller corporations, to offer such enticements - from their point of view, they are just trying to market their product as effectively as possible. There seems to be an attitude that if, for example, a free trip is disclosed in any resulting editorial then it is okay, but Savill acknowledges that "this doesn't actually mean anything to the general public".<sup>83</sup> She talks of a trip she took to Spain as the guest of the Spanish Government. She says that she justified accepting this trip because she did not write anything about it, and never had any intention of doing so. Although, this trip was also taken by other food media who did not exercise the same principles as Savill and did write articles about Spanish food without disclosing that their travel was paid for by the Spanish Government.<sup>84</sup>

The critical commentary and media watchdog website *Crikey* has, amongst many of its topics, mentioned the junket or freebie mentality within the food media. In an article titled *The Awful Truth About Media Junkets* they state:

For a study in media manipulation, astute observers should track the unstoppable penetration of olive oil in our media...the unpublished reality is that almost every

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<sup>82</sup> Savill, unpaginated

<sup>83</sup> Savill, unpaginated

<sup>84</sup> "Snake Oil or Olive Oil?," in *The Awful Truth About Media Junkets*, 9 March 2004, [on-line]; accessed 8 Nov. 2005; available from [www.crikey.com.au/whistleblower/2000/04/09-junketjournos](http://www.crikey.com.au/whistleblower/2000/04/09-junketjournos)

single one of our food writers and commentators has been taken on overseas junkets...by the *International Olive Oil Council (IOOC)*.<sup>85</sup>

The article continues on to name prominent members of the Australian food media. American food journalist Molly O'Neil, who admits to taking a few of these *IOOC* trips herself, says that she never wrote "directly" about them, so she felt that accepting the free travel was all right.<sup>86</sup> Although, she began noticing she was using olive oil on a regular basis, and as a result more and more recipes that she wrote for publication included olive oil as an ingredient.<sup>87</sup> Eventually she wrote a piece on "America's romance with Mediterranean food" and this led her to question her ethical conduct; as she puts it "do I, for instance, mention olive oil because it is delicious...or because I've been seduced by the Mediterranean mystique" as a result of these trips?<sup>88</sup> Undeniably, both O'Neil's objectivity and her duty to avoid conflicts of interest were at stake.

It is this kind of behaviour within the food media that may be viewed with distaste by mainstream media.<sup>89</sup> Articles resulting from junkets are often published in metropolitan newspapers – and this can be verified with a glance through the multitude of disclosures in any metropolitan newspaper's travel section. But the strict in-house ethical rules of most major media corporations supposedly apply to freelancers, and according to Savill the food editors of these newspapers are possibly stricter than their colleagues in travel. And, she explains, ultimately it is these section editors that usually stop publication of copy considered to be the

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<sup>85</sup> *The Awful Truth About Media Junkets*, [on-line]

<sup>86</sup> Molly O'Neil, "Food Porn," in *Columbia Journalism Review*, v42 i3 (Sept.-Oct. 2003), [on-line]; accessed 7 Sept. 2005; available [https://myuni.adelaide.edu.au/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab\\_id=\\_110\\_1](https://myuni.adelaide.edu.au/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_id=_110_1), 6

<sup>87</sup> O'Neil, 6

<sup>88</sup> O'Neil, 6

<sup>89</sup> Probyn, *Eating into Ethics*, 110

result of unethical journalism. Savill tells of a time when the editor of *Good Living*, the food supplement of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, pulled one of her stories after it was completed because they discovered it was the result of a trip she had taken to Paris - a trip paid for by a Sydney restaurant that wanted her assistance in educating their chef on French food. Even though the article did not mention the restaurant or their chef, *Good Living* would not publish it; they told her they thought it was "a bit too grey".<sup>90</sup> The ethical dilemma of freebies and junkets really does, quite simply, come back to the previously cited quote of Lyndey Milan's, "you can never write about something that you have accepted for nothing..."<sup>91</sup> If a food writer chooses to do so they are in fact deceiving the public and undermining their independence and impartiality. Because of the vague practices of this ethical dilemma within the Australian food media, it is an issue that would need detailing within a code of ethics for food writers – that is details that are more specific than those outlined in the *MEAA Code of Ethics*.

#### **3.2.4 Advertisers and spin doctors**

It is not uncommon for advertising staff and editors to ask staff writers to include something in their editorial that promotes the products of high-paying advertisers. This is an ethical dilemma faced by many journalists, not just those writing about food, and it leaves them juggling between their professional responsibilities, their publication's financial goals, and being the unwilling advocate of an advertiser's product.

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<sup>90</sup> Savill, unpaginated

<sup>91</sup> Milan, unpaginated



Indeed, as stated previously, it is not uncommon to see editorial in a food magazine that mentions products that are also advertised in the same publication. This practice was largely developed in Australia by food magazine *Super Food Ideas* whose editorial content is mostly copy provided by food manufacturers. This lowers the publishing costs, and consequently enables them to offer a cheaply priced magazine to consumers, thus making it the highest circulating food magazine in Australia. In fact, food magazines such as *Australian Good Taste* and *Australian Table*, both published by food giants Woolworths and Coles respectively, largely follow this format, and along with *Super Food Ideas* are most responsible for consistently blurring the divisions between “advertising and editorial content”.<sup>92</sup> As Frances Bonner points out in *The Media and Communications in Australia*, the editorial content of these magazines is “based around products available in store”, and so too are their recipes.<sup>93</sup> And while advertising should, at all costs, be completely disassociated with editorial, Bonner says that this ethical stance might “seem particularly naïve when boundaries are as thoroughly crossed as they are in these cases”.<sup>94</sup>

On another level, some members of the food media are under a rather constant barrage of press releases that are often accompanied by sample products. Firstly, well written press releases present the lazy food writer with an opportunity to submit a ready-made piece without fact checking or research, and secondly product samples present similar ethical dilemmas associated with freebies – although perhaps not on the same scale as a free trip to Europe. As Food Director of *The Australian Women’s Weekly*, Lyndey Milan sees a constant stream of press

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<sup>92</sup> Frances Bonner, “Magazines,” in *The Media and Communications in Australia*, eds. Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner (Crows Nest: Allen Unwin, 2002), 192

<sup>93</sup> Bonner, 192

<sup>94</sup> Bonner, 192

releases and products flow across her desk, and says “they absolutely don’t motivate me”, in fact they only serve to irritate.<sup>95</sup> And what of the food writers who copy press releases? Milan says “journalists, good journalists, do not write off press releases”, but she then admits:

Sadly, there’s...I think if you look closely at *Good Living* in the *Sydney Morning Herald* you might be surprised to see that there is a certain person that is not terribly creative and lifts from the press releases.<sup>96</sup>

A similar story to this was repeated in two other interviews conducted for this study.

Basically, food writing that is influenced by advertisers or motivated by junkets and freebies is unethical – it provides the journalist with conflict of interest, and threatens their independence. As Jean Kilbourne says, perhaps a little too ardently, in *Can’t Buy Me Love*, “democracy itself is endangered when information is given to foster private economic gain rather than to educate and enlighten the public so it can make intelligent decisions”.<sup>97</sup> This is an issue that should certainly be addressed in any code of ethics written for Australian food media. But, realistically, most food magazines are driven by commercial interest, thus preventing this type of journalism from ever ceasing completely.

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<sup>95</sup> Milan, unpaginated

<sup>96</sup> Milan, unpaginated

<sup>97</sup> Jean Kilbourne, *Can’t Buy Me Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 307

### 3.2.5 Recipe plagiarism

Plagiarism is something that is acknowledged in journalistic ethical codes around the world. Recipe plagiarism, though, is something rather unique to food journalists. Possibly the most notable case of recipe plagiarism was one that took place in the United States of America, when food journalist Richard Olney successfully sued fellow food journalist Richard Nelson for plagiarising his recipe for Brussels sprouts gratin.<sup>98</sup>

But how is a recipe plagiarised? After all, there are only so many ways that you can boil an egg. In Australia, a plagiarised recipe would be considered a breach of copyright, but interestingly the copyright only applies to the written recipe. The concept of the recipe, that is the “ingredients or methods of making a type of food” are not protected by copyright.<sup>99</sup> To clarify, *The Australian Copyright Council* states that “you will not infringe copyright if you watch someone prepare a dish and then you write down the ingredients and method in your own words”.<sup>100</sup> No matter how many loopholes there are in the copyright law, with the increasing litigious climate in Australia, breach of copyright is something that the food media should be aware of and do their utmost to avoid.

### 3.2.6 Accurate information - the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth...

Accuracy of facts is important in any form of journalism. In addition to accuracy in articles, some food writers are also faced with providing accurate recipes. Really,

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<sup>98</sup> Ann Barr and Paul Levy, “Plagiarism Pays – Usually,” in *The Official Foodie Handbook* (London: Ebury Press, 1984), 108-109

<sup>99</sup> The Australian Copyright Council. [on-line]; accessed 7 Dec. 2005, available from <http://www.copyright.org.au/pdf/acc/InfoSheets/G019.pdf>

<sup>100</sup> The Australian Copyright Council. [on-line]

the only way that a publication can ensure that a recipe is accurate is by testing. Published recipes that do not work as a result of not being tested are, in effect, deceiving the reader. Most major food publications, such as *Delicious* and *Australian Gourmet Traveller*, and even magazines with food supplements such as *New Idea*, have access to test kitchens so that their recipes can be tested at least once prior to publication. It is *The Australian Women's Weekly*, though, that has a strong reputation for fail-proof recipes, and Lyndey Milan credits this to their unique triple testing method which, she says "is really key, and all about accuracy".<sup>101</sup> But she explains that the responsibility to the readers goes deeper than just providing a recipe that works:

There are some publications around that look really clean, and look really fabulous. Now I could make our recipes look like that as well, but we won't just say 'sauté an onion', we will say 'place a medium sized saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter, add the onion'. So, our method of writing recipes is very explicit because... we put every detail in that you could possibly want and if you have a look at a lot of modern recipe writing, it doesn't do that. That is how we write our recipes and it is important in terms of not being a con on the reader.<sup>102</sup>

Because the food media often deal with topics that concern health and nutrition, the importance of accurate information is great. Like all journalists, food writers should rely on trustworthy, professional and specialist sources in order to present the reader with fair, accurate, impartial information that covers every aspect of a story. Joanna Savill says that her biggest gripe would have to be "the lack of research" that she sees in the food media.<sup>103</sup> Publishing inaccurate information certainly is a

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<sup>101</sup> Milan, unpaginated

<sup>102</sup> Milan, unpaginated

<sup>103</sup> Savill, unpaginated

breach of responsibility to the readers' trust, and will be discussed in the next chapter. But, ultimately, who is responsible for the publication of inaccurate facts – is it the editor or the journalist? Savill contends:

The onus is on anybody writing to...do their homework when it comes to backing up any kind of claims...and in the end it is up to the editor, it is the job of subs and of the editors of these publications, to make sure that the facts are checked.<sup>104</sup>

In an interview for this study, John Newton adds that:

The journalist has to deliver the copy as close as possible to the way they [the journalist] see it being published, of course they [the editors] are going to change it, you know, but the facts have to be checked, the names have to be checked...<sup>105</sup>

This slight disparity in Newton and Savill's opinions is interesting and reinforces the validity of questioning where the responsibility ultimately lies. Savill continues to explain that she is, nevertheless, rather shocked at the inaccuracies she comes across:

And that's what frightens me a lot in the food media is that facts, and even spellings and really basic stuff is not checked, often I think because they think that it is just food...and that is really frightening.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Savill, unpaginated

<sup>105</sup> Newton, Recorded interview with author, unpaginated

<sup>106</sup> Savill, unpaginated

### 3.2.7 All quiet on the food media front – writing about social and ethical eating issues

A fundamental function of the role of the food media is to assist people in decisions involving what they will or will not eat. And, increasingly, this is becoming an important role and responsibility because as John Newton explains, in the modern world:

You have to think about what you are eating, and that's the big change in the world...if you are going to eat you have to think about what you eat, and you have to be discriminatory, not about whether it has fat in it or not, but about how it is prepared.<sup>107</sup>

So, then, is the Australian food media providing consumers with the information that will equip them in making well informed food choices? Providing them with information on matters such as eating organic, free-range versus free-roaming, supporting fair trade, childhood obesity, and facts on genetic modification? Not really, according to every food writer and industry member interviewed for this study. Yet, these are issues that consumers potentially need to know about because they have implications on many aspects of life – from the economy (on a global and micro level), the environment, through to public health. Indeed, it is somewhat ironic then that the very issues flagged in the *Declaration of Adelaide*, the issues that the food media are seemingly most concerned with, are the issues that receive less editorial space than any other food-related topic. Lyndey Milan acknowledges that the public “need to know the ‘for’ and ‘against’” of these matters.<sup>108</sup> Joanna Savill agrees:

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<sup>107</sup> Newton, Recorded interview with author, unpaginated

<sup>108</sup> Savill, unpaginated

There is no debate in the food media...and the notion is that the public are not interested in debate, that somehow debate on food issues is not a subject for the food media - it is not the kind of thing you would find in a glossy food magazine, even in...*Good Living*...they don't spend a lot of time on those kinds of stories.<sup>109</sup>

But why are these matters avoided? Why are the food media somewhat silent on such issues? Indeed, the general notion does seem to be that people are not interested in reading about such matters, as Newton questions:

One of the things I find a little bit interesting, or very interesting because I am a freelancer, is I am not too sure who is driving the agenda: is it that people are not interested, or is it that editors think people aren't interested?<sup>110</sup>

Newton does write articles on such matters himself, and he enjoys doing so, and certainly there are other journalists generating articles on these subjects, but very few, and rarely in food magazines. Certainly, it is ultimately up to editors to run such articles, and as Reilly and Miller mention, publications "are carefully targeted at particular social groupings, and stories will thus, to some extent, reflect the 'personality' of the paper".<sup>111</sup> In other words, many editors will simply admit that their publications are not the forum for such issues. Lyndey Milan laments that "the trouble is too much food has become a fashion... some food magazines and books have become a fashion accessory...they are not actually about food they are about status".<sup>112</sup> Newton reiterates this feeling and can not understand why editors can "not see that trends can co-exist alongside information about the kind of foods that

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<sup>109</sup> Savill, unpaginated

<sup>110</sup> Newton, Recorded interview with author, unpaginated

<sup>111</sup> Miller and Reilly, 237

<sup>112</sup> Milan, unpaginated

you are eating, and what goes into it and the inputs and outputs that are the important parts of eating".<sup>113</sup> Sometimes, too, an editor's seeming lack of interest on such issues disguises their need to tip-toe around advertisers who, for example, might be large multinational food manufacturers exploiting these very issues. For instance, they might use unhealthy components in their products, such as palm oil, but not disclose the ingredient by quite legally using the generic term 'vegetable oil' on the product label. Undoubtedly such a manufacturer would not want an article on the dangers of unhealthy oils and food labelling next to an expensive, full page advertisement for their biscuits.

So, if the general public are supposedly not interested and if editors are not interested in informing their readers, should it then be the responsibility of the food writers to push these topics and make sure these important issues are heard and debated in a wider forum? After all, denying the public such information could almost be viewed as an ethical breach of the media's duty of disclosure. Perhaps this is a fairly idealistic view, but it should certainly be an area of potential deliberation by the Australian food media.

### **3.2.8 Biting the hand that feeds - conflicts of interest**

Dealing with conflicts of interest is an ethical consideration that interacts with almost all of those mentioned above – from accepting freebies, through to choosing not to report on an issue because it affects financial interests such as advertisers. Lyndey Milan points out an interesting dilemma that she sees occurring increasingly within the food media, and she explains:

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<sup>113</sup> Newton, Recorded interview with author, unpaginated



You can not be a food writer and a food publicist...you can not be a wine writer and a wine publicist, and sadly, we have those people here. And, I am sorry, putting a disclaimer at the bottom of your column is not sufficient.<sup>114</sup>

In a recent article published by wine journalist Ben Canaider, *Hints of Hubris and Hot Air*, he notes:

In the very small pond I swim in, plenty of the fish are fishermen as well...there are wine reviewers who also conduct public relations and marketing campaigns for wine companies...admittedly, these reviewers often declare their, um, how should we put it?, dual role...such critics don't see this as conflict...<sup>115</sup>

It should be said at this point that the food media in Australia do a good job in fulfilling their role of providing the public with food related information. Certainly, the bulk of the information reported involves lifestyle issues, or skill related information that provides consumers with knowledge on how to better select, prepare and eat fresh food. This is, indeed, a commendable function and should not be dismissed. Practising journalism ethically is a responsibility of the food media – and although there seems to be some common breaches of ethics within the food media that certainly need to be addressed, the interviews conducted for this study indicate that a lot of this behaviour is seemingly the exception rather than the rule. Although, bearing in mind the responsibility that the food media have to provide consumers with information they not only want to hear but also have a right to hear, one function the food media could most consciously improve upon could be actively striving to publish more information on social and ethical eating issues, and thus progressing the agenda outlined in the *Declaration of Adelaide*.

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<sup>114</sup> Milan, unpaginated

<sup>115</sup> Ben Canaider, "Hints of Hubris and Hot Air," in *Spectrum, Sydney Morning Herald*, 19-20 Nov. 2005, 18

## 4 BUT THE NEWSPAPER SAYS IT'S TRUE! THE IMPORTANCE OF EDIBLE ETHICS

In order for the food media to fulfil their responsibilities they must uphold professional ethical practices. Paramount to this reasoning are the consequences that unethical journalistic practices can have on the public, the food industry, and the publications for which the food media write.

### 4.1 How Much Influence does the Food Media have?

In order to comprehend the potential impact of unethical practices within the food media, we first need to consider the power of the food media - that is the influence that they can have on our food choices. Although there is little research available on the impact of the food media, as opposed to the media in general or even food advertising, it would seem that messages carried by the food media can influence our food choices.<sup>116</sup> In *Unequal Health* Ann Ralph contends that "most of us are able to make an informed choice about what we eat...these choices depend on knowledge, access to a variety of foods and money..."<sup>117</sup> And, in many circumstances, the food media is the medium that provides us with this knowledge. In *The Media and Communications in Australia*, Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner contend that "the media play a substantial role in forming our consciousness – what we think, how we think, and what we think about..."<sup>118</sup> Although, it should

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<sup>116</sup> Probyn, *Eating into Ethics*, 110

<sup>117</sup> Ann Ralph, "Unequal Health," in *Consuming Passions: Food in Age of Anxiety*, eds. Sian Griffiths and Jennifer Wallace (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 90

<sup>118</sup> Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner, eds. "The Media and Communications in Australia Today," in *The Media and Communications in Australia* (Crows Nest: Allen Unwin, 2002), 12

be kept in mind that the information sent by the media is not always absorbed by the public in the literal sense, but instead people are inclined to “interpret and contextualise” what they read.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, immediate influence is sometimes obvious explains Rodney Dunn who says that if a product is featured in the pages of *Australian Gourmet Traveller* they get feed back from retailers that demand for the product instantly increases.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, the reason that restaurants sue food critics for defamation is primarily because of the loss of income they fear will occur over the public's automatic response to an unfavourable review.

Apart from influencing the general public, the media can also be an ideal forum for public debate, and acknowledgement needs to be given to the power that the food media can wield not only on consumer choice, but on increasing the awareness and support of governments and food corporations in issues such as sustainable farming or genetic modification. For instance, in the United Kingdom “the Food Safety Act was born partially out of media coverage of salmonella and listeria”.<sup>121</sup> Surely, too, the fact that fast food giants such as *McDonald's* have improved the health content of their menus has to be partially the result of public awareness generated by food writing both in the news media, some magazines, and in publications such as Morgan Spurlock's *Don't Eat This Book: Fast Food and the Supersizing of America*.<sup>122</sup>

So, faced with the knowledge that the food media has, potentially, a great amount of influence on people's food choices, this study can now look at how unethical practices by the food media can have negative consequences that may be

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<sup>119</sup> Miller and Reilly, 239

<sup>120</sup> Dunn, unpaginated

<sup>121</sup> Miller and Reilly, 239

<sup>122</sup> Morgan Spurlock, *Don't Eat This Book* (Camberwell, Vic: Penguin Books, 2005), no page

detrimental to the food media's greatest responsibility – the consumer; as well as potentially undermining their profession, their employers, and the food industry in which they operate.

## **4.2 Consequences and Results of Breaching Ethics and Responsibilities**

When discussing the responsibilities of the Australian food media, Lyndey Milan stresses:

Our responsibility is to our readers, it is not to anyone else, it is to our readers...that's why it is important that you are accurate, that you are honest, and that you are open, because that is really important, you are not there to push anyone else's barrow.<sup>123</sup>

She acknowledges too that she also has a strong responsibility to *The Australian Women's Weekly*, which is ultimately there to turn a profit.

### **4.2.1 A duty to the consumers**

Aside from the fact that unethical behaviours such as those concerning conflicts of interest can potentially deceive readers and displace their trust, it is misinformation and also lack of information on matters of health and nutrition that can most easily cause confusion to the public. Indeed, it should be the role of a food journalist to

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<sup>123</sup> Milan, unpaginated

report on food matters related to health and nutrition without “distorting emphasis”, and with well researched fact.<sup>124</sup> But, as Simon Longstaff mentions:

The trouble is most of the reporting we get is sensationalised one way or the other - they're all good, or they're all bad... and so the capacity for the public reading this material is that they can easily feel guilty, they can be driven to guilt for giving their kid *McDonald's* once a year, or something like that...<sup>125</sup>

Reporting that is objective, that is not sensationalised, and that clearly provides the reader with impartial facts, is particularly important when food writers are faced with a major food-related public health scare, something that has not really occurred in Australia. These are the situations when the public most rely on the food media, in fact a study conducted in the United Kingdom to determine how people receive their information during a public health scare, ascertained that “media coverage was a central source on information...respondents reported that any knowledge they had about *BSE* had come from TV news or newspaper articles”.<sup>126</sup>

John Coveney points out that most problems associated with print media information on health and nutrition centre on “the ‘truth’, or more correctly, misinformation on matters of diet...sources of nutrition knowledge are constantly called into question”.<sup>127</sup> This was a concern echoed by both Lyndey Milan and John Newton during interviews for this study – but their concerns were not over inaccurate information, because both noted that many Australian food writers reporting on such issues are actually knowledgeable and qualified nutritionists.

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<sup>124</sup> MEAA, [on-line]

<sup>125</sup> Longstaff, unpaginated

<sup>126</sup> Jacquie Reilly, “Just another food scare?,” in *Message Received*, ed. Greg Philo (Essex: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 131

<sup>127</sup> Coveney, 114

Specifically, Milan and Newton both believe that, in general, the public do not always have the knowledge or skill to decipher or contextualise fundamental nutritional information, and this can lead to readers taking such information out of context, or perhaps becoming anxious about things such as fat and salt in their diets. On articles about nutrition and health, Newton says “they tell us what to eat and what not to eat and they frighten us”.<sup>128</sup> Milan says that she feels so strongly about this that she will not provide readers with any nutritional information for her recipes that appear in *The Australian Women’s Weekly*. She elaborates:

Now as far as nutritional information and all that other stuff, I fight against it all the time. I have come under a lot of pressure within the organisation to put it on [the recipes]. But I feel really strongly about it because people don’t understand - they don’t understand that if they see ten grams of fat that ten grams of fat is not very much – in fact it is low for a main course. But what kind of fat is it? Is it good fat or not? We need fat in our bodies, and people don’t understand, because the marketplace is so confused about nutrition. The only time that we will put it on – and once again, bent to pressure – is if we have run a low-fat feature and said that “these are all under whatever”. But I really fight against it.<sup>129</sup>

Choosing not to disclose this information is somewhat contrary to most journalistic ethical codes, such as that of the *MEAA* which states “do not suppress relevant available facts”. Although it is something that Milan is doing out of genuine concern for consumers – she believes nutritional information that is misunderstood or taken out of context can foster fear.<sup>130</sup> And generally, nutritional information is not included with the recipes featured in most major food magazines. Milan’s decision illustrates how journalistic ethics, rather than being a set of black and white rules,

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<sup>128</sup> Newton, Recorded interview with author, unpaginated

<sup>129</sup> Milan, unpaginated

<sup>130</sup> Milan, unpaginated

can be used as guidelines to assist a journalist in making decisions in the best interests of the public.

While the media is often accused of misleading or inaccurate information, Barbara Santich believes that “the public is well aware of the inconsistency of dietary advice”.<sup>131</sup> And, it should be acknowledged that those writing on such issues might not be doing such a bad job. For instance an Australian investigation that examined “over 400 articles on nutrition appearing between 1992 and 1994 in a range of popular Australian magazines” found that most “were considered to accurately represent current recommendation”.<sup>132</sup> So perhaps the public’s misinterpretation of information really is one reason behind most confusion on such matters? And, while this study is not considering broadcast media, it should be acknowledged that a lot of misinformation on health and nutrition issues is conveyed through television programs such as *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight*, which regularly feature embellished information on food issues. Ultimately, though, the food writer who is going to report on a topic that involves health or nutrition should have the skill to research, interpret and contextualise such information in order to provide the reader with accurate and useful knowledge.

#### **4.2.2 Breaching the brotherhood of food journalists and the food industry**

The exact power of the food journalist, or of food writing, is perhaps unknown, but the power of the food critic is, at times, quite obvious. It is important for a food critic to be aware of this power and the devastating consequences an unfavourable review – justified or not – can have on restaurateurs and chefs. An extreme

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<sup>131</sup> Santich, viii

<sup>132</sup> Coveney, 115

example of this is that of renowned *Michelin* three star chef, Bernard Loiseau, who, in 2003, shocked the culinary world with his suicide. A death that, according to industry icons such as Paul Bocuse, was the result of Loiseau's existing depression that had been exacerbated by the strong rumours that he was about to lose a star in the forthcoming *Le Guide Rouge*.<sup>133</sup> In fact, a letter from chef Jacques Pourcel to his fellow chefs cited "terrible media pressure" as the reason for the suicide.<sup>134</sup> It was not just the thought of losing a star, but it was, according to Bocuse, the addition of "two or three press articles...that is what killed Bernard".<sup>135</sup> Food critics in Australia may not have quite the supremacy of their *Michelin* counterparts, but they do have considerable sway on the restaurant industry - their reviews can and sometimes do close restaurants.

Primarily, the purpose of restaurant reviews is to inform readers, thus making them the principal concern of the food critic. Even so the critic must maintain a certain responsibility to the subjects of their criticism. As Simon Longstaff explains:

The fact that you're a critic doesn't excuse you from proper consideration of the interests of those about whom you write and whose interests are actually affected by what you have to say. That's not to say you should stop doing things, it's a question that you should hold in mind and make sure that when discharging your function you don't cause unintended negative consequences for people who don't deserve to be better treated...if I am just focusing on my craft and my obligation to my readers then I will miss all sorts of important ethical issues amongst other stakeholders.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> William Echikson, "Death of a Chef: The Changing Landscape of French Cooking," in *The New Yorker*, 12 May 2003. [on-line]; accessed 7 Sept. 2005; available from [http://www.newyorker.com/printables/fact/030512fa\\_fact2](http://www.newyorker.com/printables/fact/030512fa_fact2)

<sup>134</sup> Echikson, unpaginated

<sup>135</sup> Echikson, unpaginated

<sup>136</sup> Longstaff, unpaginated



Misleading information or even information that is unfair or unnecessary in a review or article can also have negative consequences on the food industry. In November 1999 forty well-known chefs and restaurateurs from Sydney, coerced by an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that launched a personal attack on chef Neil Perry, wrote to the editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald* complaining of the “quality of restaurant reviews” in the publication.<sup>137</sup> The article, reporting on the downgrading of Perry’s restaurant in a recent *Good Food Guide*, made reference to his hairstyle, calling it a “trademark ponytail...looking a little limp”.<sup>138</sup> The letter made the eventual point that the *Herald’s* reviews “do not support the industry which nurtures them”.<sup>139</sup> Indeed, this need for “support” and also for respect is, within reason, a responsibility that the food media have to the industry they write about, and this includes not just restaurateurs and chefs, but food producers and manufacturers.<sup>140</sup>

For many mainstream print journalists, particularly those who work as staff writers for media organisations such as *Fairfax* or the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)*, ethical conduct is an integral part of their professional lives – often dictating what they can and cannot write. In *The Journalist’s Guide to Media Law* Mark Pearson contends that some journalists see unethical behaviour as an “abuse” of Australian journalists’ generous “freedom to publish” and that such conduct “jeopardises it” for journalists that genuinely want to use this “freedom...for the greater public good”.<sup>141</sup> Perhaps this is a reason the food media are sometimes

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<sup>137</sup> Sian Powell, “A Critical Bone to Pick,” in *The Australian*, Oct. 28-Nov.3, 1999, 3

<sup>138</sup> Powell, 3

<sup>139</sup> Powell, 3

<sup>140</sup> Powell, 3

<sup>141</sup> Mark Pearson, *The Journalist’s Guide to Media Law: Dealing with Legal and Ethical Issues*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Crows Nest: Allen Unwin, 2004), 4

held in contempt by mainstream journalists, resulting from of the food media's culture of accepting freebies and junkets, particularly free travel, in return for favourable editorial?

#### 4.2.3 The publication and defamation

Apart from responsibilities to the consumer and their industry, a food writer has a responsibility to themselves and the publications in which they publish to act ethically at all times. And, most notably, this includes avoiding legal action over unethical practices such as defamation – something that can be costly, both financially and personally, to journalists and publications. Defamation, says Mark Pearson, has “the potential to leave journalists penniless and to send their companies into receivership”.<sup>142</sup> This is the reason that media companies such as *Fairfax* have legal staff scrutinise every restaurant review before going to press.

As previously noted, food writing is often subjective – particularly when it comes to a restaurant review. It is this subjective nature that most commonly leads food critics to become involved in defamation suits. A noted example of this is the 1984 “Lobster Case” where *The Sydney Morning Herald* food critic Leo Schofield was taken to court by the *Blue Angel* restaurant due to the now notorious scathing review he published.<sup>143</sup> Schofield claimed that the restaurant's lobster dish was “cooked until every drop of juice and joy in the thing had been successfully eliminated, leaving a charred husk of a shell containing meat that might have been an albino walrus”.<sup>144</sup> Schofield and *Fairfax* were unsuccessful in their defence –

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<sup>142</sup> Pearson, 4

<sup>143</sup> Pearson, 200

<sup>144</sup> Pearson, 201

primarily because they could not prove that Schofield's words were 'fair comment'. Fair comment is the most common legal defence in food related defamation charges. In order for a fair comment defence to be successful, it must be proven that a food critic's comments are "an honest opinion, the matter must be in the public domain or a matter of public interest and the comment must be fair", and not presented as "fact".<sup>145</sup> In other words, the food critic can only state their opinion when "that opinion can be proven to be based on true (provable) facts or absolutely privileged material stated in the publication".<sup>146</sup> The complexity with a fair comment defence is, as Pearson notes, that "such criticism is going to be the opinion of the commentator or reviewer...and everyone knows that it is difficult to prove the truth of your opinion".<sup>147</sup>

So does this legal threat prevent food critics from doing their jobs and providing consumers with rightful information? In fact, why not write only sweet tasting prose and avoid the risk of defamation entirely? In his article *Fare Comment*, John Newton admits "there is no doubt that the Australian reviewer is subdued by law".<sup>148</sup> Newton himself has been successfully sued for defamation in relation to a restaurant review, but he is adamant:

If I believe I have been short-changed, or that the restaurant in question is promising too much or passing off as a better place than it is, then it is my duty as a representative of my reader to write what I consider to be the truth.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Pearson, 196

<sup>146</sup> Pearson, 196

<sup>147</sup> Pearson, 196

<sup>148</sup> Newton, *Fare Comment*, 3

<sup>149</sup> Newton, *Fare Comment*, 3

Generally speaking, if the rules of fair comment are adhered to then the food critic can be at ease. A food critic who is knowledgeable and deft in the law of fair comment has the ability to write as freely as possible and provide a fair, witty and entertaining review.<sup>150</sup> This point is illustrated in the more recent 2003 case of the restaurant *Coco Roco* taking *Fairfax* and their critic, Matthew Evans, to court on a defamation charge. Here the court found that comments written by Evans and published in *The Sydney Morning Herald* were clearly his opinion, based on fact but not presented as fact, therefore the fair comment defence was successful.

For a food writer to acknowledge their responsibilities and be perceived as a professional, they need to be aware and respectful of ethical codes and laws, as well as their duty to themselves and their publication. This is somewhat tricky for the Australian food media as they do not have a specific code of ethics that addresses issues unique to their genre. In any case, acting ethically, says Pearson, is what “sets them [journalists] apart from the amateurs and the charlatans”.<sup>151</sup> But, above all, acting ethically is a way of gaining trust – trust of the public and of those within the industry. Acting ethically is a way for the food media to avoid undesirable consequences, to elevate their image and credibility, and to fulfil their responsibilities.

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<sup>150</sup> Pearson, 4

<sup>151</sup> Pearson, 4

## 5 FOOD MEDIA ASSOCIATIONS

It is clear that Australian food writers operate under the same professional classification as mainstream journalists. Although, the ethical codes that the mainstream media operate under do not necessarily address all of the ethical dilemmas that are unique to the food media.<sup>152</sup> And, as previously stated, the Australian food media, unlike their international colleagues, do not have their own professional code of ethics. It should be noted that the development of a code of ethics is an issue that has been under genuine consideration by Australia's association for the food media, the *Food Media Club of Australia*, for sometime.

### 5.1 The Food Media Club of Australia

The *Food Media Club of Australia (FMCA)* is an association of professionals who operate within the food industry. It includes food writers, editors, chefs, educators, nutritionists, restaurateurs, as well as those who work in primary industry, food manufacturing, public relations, marketing, photography and food imports and exports. Unlike some international food media organisations, membership to the *FMCA* is not only available to journalists and writers. The benefit to this is that interaction and communication is encouraged throughout all areas of the food industry. Although, as valuable as this aspect of the *FMCA* is, it could also be seen as slightly detrimental to food writer members as the ethical issues and the responsibilities faced by their specific profession are not, perhaps, addressed or supported as comprehensively as they should be.

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<sup>152</sup> Lumby and Probyn, 2

The mission statement of the *FMCA* is:

To communicate food issues and to encourage excellence and professionalism through an exchange of ideas and information

To create an environment in which food is central to the Australian culture; and

To be recognised as the key organisation that promotes excellence, professionalism, ethics and personal involvement within food, media and related industries.<sup>153</sup>

The *FMCA* also organise a yearly program of activities and seminars for their members, including workshops on current food industry issues. In 2005 the *FMCA* launched the *Food Explorer* program to encourage New South Wales school children to taste and experience foods and cooking. Their bimonthly newsletter updates and informs members on Australian food issues and *Club* activities, as well as providing information on matters such as recipe plagiarism.

## 5.2 International Food Media Organisations

There are several other organisations for food media professionals around the world, including The *Guild of Food Writers in the United Kingdom (GFWUK)*, the *New Zealand Guild of Food Writers (NZGFW)*, and the *Association of Food Journalists in the United States of America (AFJ)*.

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<sup>153</sup> *The Food Media Club of Australia*, [on-line]; accessed 26 Oct. 2005; available from <http://www.foodmediacub.com.au>

Like the *FMCA*, membership to the *NZGFW* is open to anyone who works in the food industry, although full membership is granted only to journalists, writers or editors. Membership to the *GFWUK* is open to journalists and writers, broadcasters and associated professionals such as food stylists, editors, recipe developers, but not to corporations or their representatives. Similarly, membership to the *AFJ* is open only to food journalists and writers, and includes a mixture of newspaper journalists, freelance writers, “cookbook authors”, and “syndicated columnists”.<sup>154</sup>

These three organisations have goals or mission statements that drive their agenda and outline their core interests. By comparison to the *FMCA* and possibly that of the *NZGFW*, the mission of the English organisation concentrates markedly on the professional development of members and the role of food writers. Its mission includes:

To bring together professional food writers

To extend the range of member’s knowledge and experience and keep them informed of events

To encourage the development of new writers by every means, including competitions and awards<sup>155</sup>

The mission of the *AFJ* is similar to that of their English counterparts, although perhaps less comprehensive. Their main mission is:

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<sup>154</sup> *The Association of Food Journalists*, [on-line]; accessed 21 Sept. 2005; available from <http://www.afjonline.com>

<sup>155</sup> *The Guild of Food Writers United Kingdom*, [on-line]; accessed 4 Nov. 2005; available from <http://www.gfw.co.uk>

To encourage communication among food journalists...in addition *AFJ* tries to increase members' knowledge of food and to sharpen their writing, design and broadcast skills...the group strives to foster professional standards among its members and other members of the media.<sup>156</sup>

The mission of the *NZGFW* is, like the *FMCA*, less germane to the specific profession of food journalism or writing. Its three main goals, according to President Jill Brewis, are "to learn, to inform members, and to develop networks".<sup>157</sup> Like the *FMCA*, which with over four hundred members, has the largest membership out of these four organisations, all publish newsletters and conduct activities, workshops, and seminars throughout the year. Again, a large amount of the workshops and seminars run by the associations in the United Kingdom and the United States concentrate on developing the skills and knowledge of food writers. For example, the *AFJ* has an annual seminar which holds sessions on "layout, story ideas, photography, career development and time management".<sup>158</sup> Their monthly newsletter includes updates on "professional development and ethics", and they published *FOODSPELL*, a handbook for food journalists and writers.<sup>159</sup> The *NZGFW* has a program of activities and seminars similar to that of the *FMCA*. Although, President Jill Brewis points out that "the forums have developed very informally, and certainly do not attempt the lofty goals of the *GFWUK*".<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> *The Association of Food Journalists*, [on-line]

<sup>157</sup> Jill Brewis, E-mail to author, 22 Nov. 2005, unpaginated

<sup>158</sup> *The Association of Food Journalists*, [on-line]

<sup>159</sup> *The Association of Food Journalists*, [on-line]

<sup>160</sup> Brewis, unpaginated



### 5.2.1 Campaigns by the Guild of Food Writers United Kingdom

The seminars and workshops of the *GFWUK* are centred on their “campaigning agenda”.<sup>161</sup> Rather unique to the *GFWUK* is their dedicated role “to contribute to the growth of public interest in, and knowledge of, food and to campaign for improvements in the quality of food produced and consumed in the United Kingdom”.<sup>162</sup> The *Guild* has a “food policy” which is continually updated, but presently includes matters such as teaching school children cooking skills, raising awareness on the issues surrounding genetic modification, pressing the governments to assist farmers and organics, and campaigning against food poverty.<sup>163</sup>

Although not dissimilar to the mandate outlined in the 2005 *Declaration of Adelaide*, the *GFWUK* take a very “active and proactive” stance in ensuring progress and results on these issues.<sup>164</sup> They encourage members to stand united in “taking strong and leading stances” on these issues.<sup>165</sup> And they do this by providing comprehensive education to members in the form of workshops and information on their website. The members’ website provides almost exhaustive information on campaign issues including reports, links to relevant websites, and the suggested names of key people that the food media may wish to interview. In a sense, the website is almost a research assistant for members.

In 2005, the *GFWUK* was actively involved in campaigns involving dioxins in farmed salmon, standardising the use of the metric system in the United Kingdom,

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<sup>161</sup> Miller and Reilly, 238

<sup>162</sup> *The Guild of Food Writers United Kingdom*, [on-line]

<sup>163</sup> *The Guild of Food Writers United Kingdom*, [on-line]

<sup>164</sup> *The Guild of Food Writers United Kingdom*, [on-line]

<sup>165</sup> *The Guild of Food Writers United Kingdom*, [on-line]

and public health issues such as the Sudan-dye problem where hundreds of imported food products were found to contain a carcinogenic substance. They have a food policy committee who determine and flag issues they feel are important for the food media to tackle, and they also participate in various external committees such as *Five Year Freeze*, a United Kingdom association dedicated to “advocating a five year freeze” on genetically modified farming and products.<sup>166</sup>

Silvija Davidson, Chair of the *GFWUK Food Policy Committee* until 2005, says that their solo campaigns are somewhat limited because they are “a volunteer organisation of working people and cannot take the time required for a truly high powered campaign”.<sup>167</sup> What makes the campaigns effective, she says, is the *GFWUK* contributing their voice to the “well targeted campaigns” of consumer organisations and Government authorities, “principally the *Food Standard Authority*”.<sup>168</sup> Davidson believes that this is what creates “some impact, particularly on those issues where we feel confident of the support of the majority of members”.<sup>169</sup>

Considering the obviously mammoth amount of work that goes into this agenda, the question has to be asked, does it actually produce noticeable results, and is it worth while? The answer is yes, but Davidson reasons, “I suspect we only make a tiny impact on mainstream media reportage”.<sup>170</sup> Although she acknowledges that there is now a “fairly widespread imparting of information on provenance of food and sustainability issues”.<sup>171</sup> She also deduces that the impact of the food media is

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<sup>166</sup> *The Guild of Food Writers United Kingdom*, [on-line]

<sup>167</sup> Silvija Davidson, E-mail to author, 16 Dec. 2005, unpaginated

<sup>168</sup> Davidson, unpaginated

<sup>169</sup> Davidson, unpaginated

<sup>170</sup> Davidson, unpaginated

<sup>171</sup> Davidson, unpaginated

greater when “food scares...are the real driving force”.<sup>172</sup> During the 1995 *Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE)* crisis, the food media banded together to raise public awareness on widespread inadequate abattoir procedures and to consequently pressure the Government into taking action.<sup>173</sup> As Alison Reilly and David Miller note in their report on the role of the media in food issues, “undoubtedly media attention has in this way influenced policy on BSE: the media have been used to force the government to ‘go public’”.<sup>174</sup>

Referring to the campaigns run by the *Guild of Food Writers in the United Kingdom*, Reilly and Miller note:

One consequence of this process has been the opening up of space in the food pages for critical and political views on food as well as just recipes and gourmet writing.<sup>175</sup>

This is, without doubt, something that the Australian food media should note.

### 5.2.2 Ethical codes

One apparent point that distinguishes the international associations from the *FMCA* is that each has their own set of ethical codes. The *Code of Professional Ethics* for the *NZGFW* was written when they formed in 1988.<sup>176</sup> They have an ethics committee of two members that is independent to the *Guild's* executive committee.

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<sup>172</sup> Davidson, unpaginated

<sup>173</sup> Miller and Reilly, 247

<sup>174</sup> Miller and Reilly, 247

<sup>175</sup> Miller and Reilly, 238

<sup>176</sup> Refer Appendix 7.6: Code of Professional Ethics for NZGFW

All ethical matters requiring what Jill Brewis calls “clarification” are referred to the ethics committee, which keeps its findings confidential.<sup>177</sup> Although their *Code*, to some degree, refers to the specific ethical concerns of food writers, it is perhaps not terribly comprehensive and rather vague in its statements in comparison to other mainstream journalistic codes. The New Zealand *Code* seems to be most concerned with plagiarism, both intellectual and copyright, as do the *Ethical Guidelines* of the *GFWUK* which dedicates three out of their nine ethical statements to the matter.<sup>178</sup> Jill Brewis says that she believes that “one of the greyest areas for food writers is that of copyright of recipes” which is why the code is so concerned with the issue.<sup>179</sup>

The *Association of Food Journalists* in the United States of America has possibly the most comprehensive *Code of Ethics* of all three of these associations.<sup>180</sup> Based on mainstream journalistic codes, it clearly and directly addresses the issues of junkets or freebies, conflicts of interest within the industry, as well as accurate and impartial reporting. Although this *Code* does refer to recipe plagiarism, it does not do so in the same detail of the New Zealand or United Kingdom codes. The *AFJ* offers a separate four page document of ethical guidelines for food critics which acknowledges issues such as anonymity, negative reviews, payment of meals, conflicts of interest, and restaurant rating systems.<sup>181</sup> Like New Zealand, both the *AFJ* and the *GFWUK* have ethics committees that deal with ethical matters and keep all such matters confidential. This form of regulation

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<sup>177</sup> Brewis, unpaginated

<sup>178</sup> Refer Appendix 7.7: Ethical Guidelines of GFWUK

<sup>179</sup> Brewis, unpaginated

<sup>180</sup> Refer Appendix 7.8: Code of Ethics of AFJ

<sup>181</sup> Refer Appendix 7.9: Ethical Guidelines for Food Critics of AFJ

is essential to give authority or worth to any form of professional self regulation,  
such as ethical codes.

## 6 CONCLUSION - THE FUTURE

### FOR AUSTRALIA'S FOOD MEDIA

Having established the role and responsibilities of Australia's food media, this study then looked at their ethical dilemmas. The influence the food media has on consumers' food choices along with the consequences of unethical food journalism were examined to emphasise the importance of the food media's ethical fulfilment of their role and responsibilities. Finally the goals and functions of the *Food Media Club of Australia (FMCA)* were outlined, along with their international equivalents, which will allow this study to now determine the worth of a specific code of ethics for Australia's food media, and the possibility of progressing their agenda on the issues outlined in the *Declaration of Adelaide*.

#### 6.1 Australian Edible Ethics

The Australian food media are, in no way, any more unethical than the mainstream media – we need only look at instances such as the 'cash for comment' scandal to realise that unethical behaviour occurs throughout all genres of journalism.<sup>182</sup>

However, when discussing the ethical behaviour of the food industry, Elspeth Probyn admits that "the state of food journalism in this country could be better".<sup>183</sup>

What is immediately apparent is that today's food media operate in the same

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<sup>182</sup> Graeme Turner, "Ethics, Entertainment and the Tabloid," in *Remote Control: New Media New Ethics*, eds. Catharine Lumby and Elspeth Probyn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 87

In 1999 prominent Sydney talkback radio hosts were accused and subsequently found guilty of not disclosing their commercial contracts with corporations that they were discussing in the context of current news on their programmes. This became known as the 'cash for comment' scandal.

<sup>183</sup> Probyn, *Eating into Ethics*, 121

industry as mainstream journalists, and therefore should be subjected to practising with ethical integrity, and perhaps under similar ethical codes.

If the *FMCA* were to implement a code of ethics, they would obviously need to consider both mainstream journalistic ethics as well as the specific ethical considerations of the food media - perhaps consulting and drawing on the strength of systems implemented by their international colleagues. Lyndey Milan, who is also a past President of the *FMCA*, reasons "if you are going to put something in place you actually have to have the team to carry it out".<sup>184</sup> And this raises an important point – ethical codes need to be supported by professional bodies in order to have any effect or worth. This support would need to be in the form of education to members on journalistic ethics, but also the provision of some type of ethics sub-committee to add credibility, weight and purpose to the process. Without such support, there is little encouragement for the media to consider ethics, and therefore little credibility to the worth of the code itself. When developing a code, the questions of purpose and practicality should be a guiding factor, in other words, they need to ask - what are the goals of this code of ethics? Apart from providing journalists with guidance on ethical dilemmas, and providing professional principles as previously discussed, do these codes actually have any practical value in terms of thwarting unethical practices? This is difficult to ascertain, primarily because the dealings of all professional ethics committees are, rightly, confidential. When faced with this question on the practical value of journalistic ethical codes, Simon Longstaff of the *St James Ethics Centre* explains:

Well, you can't tell, that's the problem. A highly effective, self-regulatory framework, in which people exercise quite strong judgement against their peers

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<sup>184</sup> Milan, unpaginated

and engage them in corrective behaviour and informal sanction, can be remarkably powerful. In fact it can be more powerful than the formal mechanisms but of course, because it happens without much transparency, you have no way of knowing whether or not anyone is doing anything, and you have no way of knowing whether the processes being employed upholds the kind of standards you would expect.<sup>185</sup>

It should be kept in mind that vague codes filled with ambitious and inspirational prose can “tend to be so lofty they become weightless” and therefore ineffectual.<sup>186</sup> On the other hand, codes that are long lists of regimented regulations can “be too long, too detailed, inflexible”.<sup>187</sup> The *MEAA Ethics Review Committee* believes that an effective code should be “a mixture of the two”.<sup>188</sup> Most important, though, before undertaking the process of drafting a code of ethics, is the understanding that a code can not be expected to stop unethical practices within the food media. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that we live in an increasingly commercial age where food manufacturers and producers compete in a extremely large market, and realistically practices such as media product placement and undeclared advertorial are not going to disappear.

Essentially, a code of ethics for the Australian food media would be there to guide food writers with ethical dilemmas and to raise their consciousness of ethical practices. Moreover, it should be remembered that a code of ethics can encourage some respect from peers, industry and the general public. Colin Spencer, past President of the *GFWUK*, was responsible for the development of their *Ethical*

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<sup>185</sup> Longstaff, unpaginated

<sup>186</sup> *Ethics in Journalism*, 12-15

<sup>187</sup> *Ethics in Journalism*, 12-15

<sup>188</sup> *Ethics in Journalism*, 12-15



*Guidelines*. He says that fundamental reason they developed them was because “a solid caucus of eminent food writers with the Guild were pressing for some ideal statement to show where we stood in today’s society”.<sup>189</sup> In the end journalistic ethics are not just about being objective and avoiding free offerings. Journalistic ethics are essentially about performing a duty to the public – getting accurate information to the public, information that they might need or want to hear. And, in the process of fulfilling this role, the writer must then consider things such as objectivity, conflict of interest, and plagiarism. Ultimately, though, any code of ethics for *FMCA* members should be an acknowledgement to the public of the Australian food media’s own understanding of their role and responsibilities - this includes operating under their own code of ethics, and doing their absolute utmost in speaking out on issues that they believe the public need to hear. Most importantly, to have any sort of impact, an ethical code would need strong and practical support from the *FMCA*. An ethical code for Australian food writers is needed – it may not prevent certain practices, and it will probably not make any instantaneous differences, but it will most certainly make a start in increasing the credibility of our food media.

## **6.2 Educating the Educators, and a United Voice**

Certainly we have some world-acclaimed Australian food writers, for example Stephanie Alexander, John Newton, and Terry Durack. We are also fortunate to have, for a country of our population, a large range of food magazines and newspaper supplements, especially considering the number of general magazines that include food in their pages on a regular basis. Frankly, though, it seems that the general opinion amongst the food media, and certainly those interviewed for

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<sup>189</sup> Colin Spencer, E-mail to author, 13 Dec. 2005, unpaginated

this study, is that there is a distinct lack of hard food news reported within these pages, and more of what American food journalist Molly O'Neil calls "wistful nostalgia" or desirable culinary trends.<sup>190</sup> Food Marketing Consultant and Committee Member of the *FMCA*, Gawen Rudder, asserts:

My personal feeling is that food media, written by specialists in food...I think that it shirks its responsibilities when it comes to the big issues. I haven't read in any food magazine about the food labelling issues that the tractors to Canberra are talking about [campaigning for country of origin to appear on labels] – it is not popular with writers, but shouldn't it be somewhere there? In terms of the purity of food, and organics, organics is still seen as something of a fringe topic – it still has that 'hippy-mung bean' image, and it is rarely written about with any degree of seriousness. When you consider the issues...with exception of someone like John Newton, no one took on the issues of what was happening to our food through imported soybeans. I actually wrote to *Good Living*, and they said 'no we don't address those issues'. If you look at the food media, I think it goes for soft issues, and it doesn't go for the hard issues. Whereas in the United Kingdom, they go for a stronger attack on the hard food issues.<sup>191</sup>

The fact that prominent members of the Australian food media recently signed the *Declaration of Adelaide* outlining their desires for the future of food indicates that these issues are of priority to the food media. Although, signing a declaration largely in the presence of food industry players is, possibly, rather ineffective – preaching to the converted almost. Proof of this is the lack of publicity that the *Declaration* received in Sydney press. Perhaps, then, one of the most important things that the *FMCA* can do to ensure that the food media most effectively fulfil their role and responsibilities, is to consider the worth of the *GFWUK* campaigns,

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<sup>190</sup> O'Neil, 8

<sup>191</sup> Gawen Rudder, Recorded interview with author, 11 Aug. 2005

and to encourage their members to become more involved and to speak loudly and clearly on the issues that they truly care about. When asked about the lack of editorial space dedicated to social and ethical eating issues reaching the public, John Newton admitted:

I don't think that there is anything that the food media as a whole can do because food media as a whole, as evidenced by the FMCA, is not, is NOT [his emphasis], speaking with a single voice – as I believe that the Food Writers Guild in England does. I mean the Food Writers Guild, I met the president, and he said it was the Food Writers Guild in England that stopped the advance of genetic modification – because they spoke with one voice and they said 'we don't want this yet'...you know 'we may never want it, but at least for the moment we don't want it'. You wouldn't get our Food Media Club to .... I'll say it, to hell with it, you wouldn't get them to agree with it - I'd love to see a food media club proper. I have nothing [against the FMCA] I am a member of the FMCA, I go to some of the functions and I think that they perform a useful function, but I would like there to be a food writers club.<sup>192</sup>

Surely, though, the *FMCA* has the potential (and possibly the desire) to incorporate the function of what Newton calls a "proper" association for food journalists into its current agenda?<sup>193</sup>

In order to fully inform the public on food issues such as those outlined in the *Declaration of Adelaide*, and to coerce editors, governments and corporations into considering such issues, the *FMCA* needs to be more proactive, perhaps incorporating more workshops and briefings on issues such as sustainable

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<sup>192</sup> Newton, Recorded interview with author, unpaginated

<sup>193</sup> Newton, Recorded interview with author, unpaginated

agriculture into their event calendar, as well as providing members with access to relevant information similar to that provided by the *GFWUK*. This will impart Australian food writers with further knowledge, and give them the power to speak with confidence and accuracy, and to reach the public with a united voice. In addition, active consultation with Government bodies and activist groups such as *Greenpeace*, who currently drive Australia's anti-genetic modification campaign, would further drive such issues. This is one way to make a start in better fulfilling the responsibilities that the food media have to the consumers, to provide a public service and to make a difference to the future of Australian food.

Undeniably, this would not be a small task for either the *FMCA* or the food writers themselves. For instance, they would have the task of convincing editors to publish sometimes controversial or contentious articles – but, with an increase in ethical and professional credibility and the power of united pressure, perhaps the Australian food media can achieve the same results as their British colleagues and obtain more pages dedicated to worthy food issues? Once again, the strong support of the *FMCA* would be necessary for a code of ethics and any sort of campaigning to have even a small amount of success.

As previously mentioned, most of the current content of food pages and magazines is not without worth – providing the public with recipes, teaching them how to cook, and encouraging them to use fresh food is certainly credible. But, whether or not the public want to know how battery-hen eggs are produced, or what net fishing is doing to our oceans and fisheries, or even about the disdain that some multinational food corporations have for subsistence crops and free trade issues, they have a right to know. Journalists are supposed to research, write and inform

the general public, and to “animate democracy”.<sup>194</sup> The readers have a right to receive honest, fair, accurate and impartial information so that they can make the best food choices possible. And, when they read an article on a biodynamic vineyard, they have the right to trust that it was not written by a journalist who also promotes wine from the same vineyard, as indeed they have the right to expect that the writer of an article on the virtues of Spanish olive oil is giving an impartial view that has not been swayed by a free trip to the Mediterranean.

The food media of Australia needs to cement their professional role as journalists through the practice of professional ethics which will strengthen their image and credibility within the media industry, the food industry, and also to the public. But, more importantly, to show genuine concern for the future of our food and the issues they care about, and to better fulfil their responsibilities of informing the general public, the food media of Australia needs to be active, vocal, and speak with one loud and strong voice.

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<sup>194</sup> Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, [on-line]

## 7 APPENDICES

## **7.1 Transcripts of Interviews**

## Interview with Dr Simon Longstaff from the St James Ethics Centre

2.30pm Wednesday 26 November 2005

The following is explained by SW to SL:

### **THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AUSTRALIA'S FOOD MEDIA**

- *My study is looking at the type of information that the food media reports. I am also interested in the changing role of the food media and how this impacts upon its role in dealing with journalistic ethics, as well as delivering true and accurate information to media consumers*
- *For the purposes of my study, I have defined 'food media' as all food related print media generated in Sydney, including publications that have national circulation.*
- *Interviewing Dr Longstaff because can't get in touch with anyone relevant from the AJA, and was hoping that he could shed some light on the ethics associated with journalists, particularly the accountability surrounding these ethics.*
- *Also like to get Dr Longstaff's opinion on the ethics on food and subject of food.*

**SW: The ethical guidelines which Australian Journalists operate under are set out by the AJA, and I have read through them. But I would be interested to hear from you as to why you think these guidelines are essential?**

SL: Well there is a pivotal question which submerges with journalists and that is to do with whether or not they belong to a profession or to a guild. Now the Media and Entertainment Arts Alliance which AJA is a part of, is a union. And, to that extent, it has the characteristics of a guild because it is organised for the benefits of its members. But, it is equally true that journalists will often say to themselves that they are members of a profession and the difference is that if you move into a profession then two things happen:

- first of all you are obliged, if you take it seriously, always to act in the spirit of public service – that is the interests of yourself, your employer and a whole lot of other people have to be subordinated to what is in the interests of society. That is a very unusual step to take, because in general life, the market economy is the dominant framework within which people make decisions, and it explicitly endorses self interest to look after yourself and the invisible hand, and the market will make us all better off.
- So, the second thing that comes from being a member of a profession is that there is almost always some defining purpose that you serve. So, a medical practitioner – whether it is a nurse or a doctor, the purpose they seek to serve is that of human well-being. They may need to struggle with it, understand it, deal with it. Lawyers are supposed to seek justice. Journalist, well they are supposed to seek the truth. So, before you even get to any codification of rules, there's a kind of cultural context, or sub-cultural context to the professional life within you act in the spirit of public service and the pursuit of a defining good, which in this case would be the truth. But once you get to that point, then you can start to cash out on all sorts of things to do with how you deal with conflicts of interest, disclosure, and where people have interests. For example, rights of fair comment.

SW: Like 'cash for comment'.

SL: Yeah, all that sort of thing. It's to do with whether or not the journalist is seen to be the person who is a mouthpiece for a particular perspective, or whether or not they constantly strive to maintain the position of a disinterested reporter, and occasionally a disinterested commentator. And of course, what we find in the case of 'cash for comment' is people who were extensively commenting because they believed something to an audience that thought they were giving a true expression of their own opinion, but in fact they were merely mouthing the words that a sponsor had paid them to say.

So, I think that is where I want to ground the conversation about food journalists. Now of course truth isn't the only consideration, there are things that are true which ought not to be said. For example, in the political sphere there is a really important distinction between what the public is interested in, which could be gossip about people's personal lives... things like that, and what is in the public interest. And, the legitimate case of reportage and comment is in the public interests space and not just what people happen to be interested in. There is a convention in Australian journalism that when a person commits suicide you don't describe the method by which they did so - now there is a bit of truthful information which is therefore being withheld, but because there is an agreement not to disclose it, adds no advantage, and possibly causes harm because it induces others to engage in copy-cat activity. So journalists are not just there as a kind of box that information passes through and out into the world. There is also a requirement for discernment – about what you don't report, and then how you report things that are true.



**SW: Yes, that certainly comes into play when you are talking about food critics. When I talk about food media, I am only talking about print media, purely because I only have space (in my thesis) to discuss print. For example, someone like the Australian Consumers Association are considered to be food writers for the purposes of this study because**

SL: they publish information on food.

**SW: yeah, exactly. They have said to me that they will hold back information if they think that it hasn't been explored fully enough yet. So maybe it's scientific information that could create a bit of an uproar...**

SL: probably an unsubstantiated claim

SW: exactly, so they will hold it back until they've got further information. Where as the average food writer that I've interviewed that might be writing for the newspaper, for example, won't.

**SW: Do you know if there is any, apart from the obvious breaches such as 'cash for comment', do you know if there is any formal monitoring of the AJA ethics? What happens when a journalist breaches these codes?**

SL: I think that there is an element of self regulation, which is not at all transparent. You never hear of people being censured under the code of ethics, even if does occasionally happen. There is also the activities of the Press Council which is a statutory formal body that is capable of expressing views about these things, but again, it's reasonably rare. But, of course, then, journalists are sometimes called to account in the courts where they may have been defaming somebody. The closest you can get is when a critic bags someone's restaurant. That's happened occasionally.

SW: Oh, yes, quite a few times.

SL: There is a case running in the courts at the moment in which a timber company has sought to prosecute activists for being nasty about them. You can imagine a large food company taking to task nutritionists that campaign against their products. But these are more litigious requirements more than day-to-day accountability, and I really don't think any of us know much about how that is done.

**SW: Yes, interesting. So do they (the AJA ethics) have much worth in that case?**

SL: Well, you can't tell, that's the problem. A highly effective, self-regulatory framework, in which people exercise quite strong judgement against their peers and engage them in corrective behaviour and informal sanction, can be remarkably powerful. In fact it can be more powerful than the formal mechanisms but of course, because it happens without much transparency, a: you have know way of knowing whether or not anyone is doing anything, and b: you have know way of knowing whether the processes being employed uphold the kind of standards you would expect.

**SW: You have kind of already answered this question for me...but, I have been speaking to a lot of writers and editors and asking to what extent they believe the reporting of unbiased and true information about food to be their responsibility. And, absolutely all of them, bar one (who has actually stoped reviewing now because he believes it is not ethical as people know his face) – all of them think that food is subjective and that the writer should treat it is such and that they should not be doing objective reporting. What are your views on this?**

SL: I think those who think this are perhaps somewhat confused in their thinking. It is true that some aspects of comment about food are subjective. In a restaurant there are facts which are not subjective – either the food was hot, or it was cold. Either the wine was corked, or it was not. Either the soup had a prawn in it, or it didn't. There is a lot about food that is not subjective which is part of the critic's task to report. If someone promises a hot meal and you get a cold one, its late, the wine was off and no one cared – these are all matters that any objective observer could note and should note in their report. It is also true to say that there is an element to a judgement of what constitutes a good meal, which is a matter of taste – literally. And to that extent, food is subjective. And what we rely upon in the case of the critic, is the capacity to bring some kind of formed judgement. But it should be a judgement that is both free from any kind of conflict, in the sense that if you have a duty to the food producer you have a conflict of interest. If it is entirely unavoidable it ought to be declared. But equally, it is not enough, I think, to say that you can be the well-known foodie around town and just sit down at a restaurant and expect that what you will be served will be the common fare (that will be fed to others). And that's what goes to the heart of what a review is about. I don't want to read a review of what was the one and only special meal that was cooked in the kitchen in the past fortnight, because that betrays my reason for reading it, what I want to read is... the person who sets themselves up as a food critic takes up the pen not to communicate with other food critics whose faces are well known, but in order to provide

information to the great unwashed like me, who no one will know when I walk into a restaurant. And I have to rely upon the fact that the service experienced, the food eaten, had all been prepared on the assumption that whoever has been reviewing was just an ordinary punter. So then, any critic, who thinks that they can continue to discharge their function that they promise to the public – that is, this a review about what you will find – is, I think, deceiving themselves and ultimately they are engaging in deceptive conduct. Because what they offer in their criticism to the public, is something that they can never deliver once they cross a certain point.

**SW: Talking a little bit about the subjectivity of food. I am under the opinion that some food writers believe food is subjective.**

SL: Some is

**SW: Yes, some is, but I think some tend to think that this is an inroad to over embellishing (when writing). But this might be okay? For example, it might be a fact that there was no prawn in my prawn soup, but they will go on to describe it in a humorous manner to get a rise out of the reader.**

SL: I think that this is okay, as long as your writing does not mislead either because you have had a special meal prepared for you because you are such a well known foodie, or because you choose to ignore important information that the average dinner would need to know in making their assessment. Then if you've got those bases covered and you go on to write in a form of writing which is entertaining, which conveys a persona, that you might have adopted, I think that is fine. It's like when you are cooking – if you prepare a prawn soup and there are no prawns in it, then you have a bit of a problem, but if you put prawns as a bit of a garnish, then that's fine.

**SW: What do you think are the consequences of subjective or bias food writing?**

SL: Firstly, it is a breach of promise to the readership. The reader buys the paper on the basis that it is telling them something that they can rely upon in making a judgement, so I think devalues the whole process of doing that. Once you start to do that of course, it also has an adverse effect on people's trust in relation to the things you write about, which are not just about your subjective opinions. Some food writers may stray from writing restaurant reviews to and get into issues of public health and safety, the ethics of how food is prepared (i.e. some food writers may also be both critic and writer) and if you've already set yourself up as a person who unmindful of the obligation you owe to your readership because you've been unconcerned about the structural issues that arise as a critic, then I think that you effectively disqualify yourself from being taken seriously when you write about these other things. Because, you know, you can't say I'm a little bit cavalier when I am writing a review, but I am really serious when I am doing something on these other issues. But if you've just got the person who never does anything but write about restaurants, then I still think that it would be wrong, but it may not have the same dangerous effect – it's where you get that cross over that I think some of the greater mischief can be (found).

**SW: Does the journalist have an ethical responsibility to, say, the chef and the livelihood of his/her restaurant?**

SL: I think that the fact that you're a critic doesn't excuse you from proper consideration of the interests of those about whom you write and whose interests are actually affected by what you have to say. That's not to say you should stop doing things, it's a question that you should hold in mind and make sure that when discharging your function you don't cause unintended negative consequences for people who don't deserve to be better treated. So, I might be writing, for example about a particular companies products, and I might want to say some really harsh things about it, and I might be tempted to think that I have no obligation to them at all – for example, I might not warn them, I might not think that I have to give them a chance of right of reply to explain the situation, whether it was an aberration or a more significant problem. If I am just focusing on my craft and my obligation to my readers then I will miss all sorts of important ethical issues amongst other stakeholders. So, the food writer who wants to be complete in their ethical commitment to what they do needs to have a slightly broader perspective and a capacity to notice the relevant ethical issues and then adequately managing them.

**SW: So, going back to what you said in the beginning of our conversation about withholding information. Say a food writer goes to a restaurant and has a bad experience, an atrocious meal, or they learn something that could potentially put a company out of business. Should this be written about?**

SL: Let's presume they were an anonymous diner, no obvious signs of disadvantage such as a fire in the kitchen or a death in the family or something, then what they are asked to do is to ask about their experience at the time. And, they can do that without malice, it's a matter of telling people – if it is

entertaining and witty then it is no bad thing. I think that those people who present food to the public, in the restaurant environment, and even encourage reviews to be done, have to accept that if their not up to standard it is just a fact that they get an honest appraisal – and it might be good, it might be bad, but they've then got the chance to do something about it.

SW: So you think it is fair game, so to speak?

SL: I think it is reasonable. If you have an experience where you come in to a restaurant, let's say you're a very important person in the food world, and you come in and you're not given the best table and you sit down and the service is not as attentive as you are used to where you are better recognised, and therefore you think 'well I am going to teach these people and say that their food was hopeless etc', if that's not true, but instead you based your review with some bile because of the lack of attention, then that would be wrong.

**SW: Okay. What about unbalanced reporting, for example a food writer writing about McDonalds and the detrimental effects it could have on somebody's health, but then not balancing that with the fact that if you eat it only occasionally it is not going to harm you?**

SL: Same with a review –you need to look beyond what seems to be just a bad performance. You need to tell people and the same thing with the arguments about McDonalds. The trouble is most of the reporting we get is sensationalised one way or the other. They're all good, or they're all bad. And so the capacity for the public reading this material is that they can easily feel guilty, they can be driven to guilt for giving their kid McDonalds once a year, or something like that. But that (unbalanced reporting) doesn't strike me as responsible. I think you've got to way into the balance, what's the context in which you are doing this. I mean, a number of these companies that have been subjected to criticism, to my mind, have made really significance reforms to the menus that they prepare, the marketing that they engage in. And to ignore that in its entirety just because you have an agenda to draw attention to just one aspect of their work doesn't strike me as a basis for balance or truth – it is a very partial account.

**SW: So, then, you think that unbalanced reporting has consequences?**

SL: Whether or not every single article has to have balance, or whether or not there is a task here for editors to ensure that within reasonable time all the points of view or relevant points are articulated – but that's another issue. But I think even if you've got a powerful writer, the more they are listened to, probably the more obligation they've got to get the balance as well as they can in the piece they are produced.

**SW: A couple of years ago, two Sydney academics wrote that food media is often viewed in "condescending ways" by mainstream media because they "don't report facts, they give opinion". And, interestingly enough, a lot of the food writers I have spoken to do not consider themselves journalists but food writers. Given that, should they be operating under the guise of 'food writers' or as 'journalists'?**

SL: I think that to the extent that food writers now include such a broad range of people who are writing about nutrition, animal husbandry, marketing, symbolism – all of these sociological issues- they definitely need to see themselves as either journalists who report, or journalists who comment and they should be bound by the same obligations. The analogue of what they are saying, when John Laws was first called to account in relation to cash for comment his immediate response was to say 'I'm not a journalist, I'm just an entertainer'.

SW: Really?

SL: Yeah, and he made that comment in order to suggest that entertainers would be excused from the kind of ethical obligations that journalists are formally required to uphold. I think for food writers to say 'I'm not a journalist, I'm just a food writer'...you might have got a sense if they were just clowns talking about their restaurant experiences about town...

SW: No, I am talking about a seriously regarded food writer.

SL: Yeah, well I think that they had better put away their pencils if they are going to write anything other than restaurant reviews.

SW: Okay

SL: If they pick up their pencils to write about anything else, then they are a journalist. They're in journalistic territory.

**SW:** In the UK the FWG (and equivalent in the USA) both have their own code of ethics. We don't here – we have the FMCA – but there is absolutely not mention of ethics. I think that they are planning on discussing it in the future.

SL: I spoke to them once.

**SW:** That's right, Gawen did mention it to me. But, what do you think about this? You talked a bit before about being a profession etc.

SL: Yes, it just goes back to my comments about that.

**SW:** Okay, so do you think the food media's ethical conduct should be considered?

SL: Absolutely. As it should be for anybody. But there is a particular context that we have talked about that gives it (the food media) a special focus as well.

**SW:** Great. That's all I have for you. You have a very specific area of knowledge, and it is hard to find someone with your expertise. It is good to hear from someone who isn't related to the industry as such. So, thank you very much for your time.

SL: Good luck with it all.

**INTERVIEW CONCLUDES**

## Interview with Rodney Dunn, Food Editor Australian Gourmet Traveller

10am Tuesday 19 July 2005

### **SW & RD start chatting about his job.**

RD: I do some writing, we have a section called Masterclass which I do the writing and recipes for...I've just started to review stuff for our restaurant guide which comes out in November.

SW: Do you enjoy that?

RD: Oh...who wouldn't?

SW: Yes, it's great isn't it?

RD: It's a challenge too and you realise how hard it is...so the writing thing is new to me not coming from a journalistic background, but loving books, absolutely loving cook books and things. So I have been really lucky to have that opportunity.

SW: So how long have you been doing this for?

RD: Umm all up probably six years from cooking in kitchens to where I am now. To pay the bills I had to do agency cheffing and then when I got enough work cooking on photo shoots, that was a skill I had at the time, and then moving into starting to write recipes to doing stuff for television like Better Homes and Gardens.

SW: So do you do most of the recipe development for the magazine?

RD: Yes, exactly – along with our food team. We also use a couple of other people. Quite often, say something like Asian foods and we're not experts then we will use some like Tony Tan, and then chefs too.

SW: Yeah, Tony Tan is releasing a new book isn't he? On Nonya?

RD: Yes, he is – that's right, on Nonya.

SW: I am really looking forward to that.

RD: Me too. He did Sichuan for the magazine – Hong Kong.

SW: Okay, let's start.

### **THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AUSTRALIA'S FOOD MEDIA.**

- *My study is looking at the type of information that the food media reports. I am also interested in the changing role of the food media and how this impacts upon its role in dealing with journalistic ethics, as well as delivering true and accurate information to media consumers*
- *For the purposes of my study, I have defined 'food media' as all food related print media generated in Sydney, including publications that have national circulation.*

SW then explains:

- *For the purposes of my study I have classified "consumer information" into five categories (all explained by interviewer):*

1. *Health and Nutritional issues e.g. health risks, dietary info*
2. *Product information e.g. general info on foods*
3. *Skill related information e.g. recipes and cooking instructions*
4. *Ethical eating issues e.g. genetic modification, organics*
5. *Lifestyle information. restaurant reviews, "what's hot and what's not", ideas on entertaining, table decoration etc.*

**SW: What type of information would you say AGT tends to report?**

RD: Well, restaurants, we try to do what's hot and what's not, we try to set trends, we try not to follow them being in the market that we are

SW: Well your competitor magazine (Vogue) – that is what they are about, so I guess you have to do that too.

RD: Yes, yes. We try and inform people to – I think that there is an education process. There are things that are around them that they don't necessarily use, for instance vegetables and fruit and stuff that are prevalent. I mean I tend to, I really like bringing old things back, that whole retro thing...

**SW: That's great. You don't really do anything on health and nutrition.**

RD: No.

**SW: But do you sometimes touch on social or ethical eating issues?**

RD: We do, um, at the moment we are trying to do stuff that is really information based. We just did something on Wagyu beef.

SW: Yes, I saw that.

RD: We've got something coming up on chicken – our features editor will generally write information on that – so is it worth buying a \$40 organic chicken... generally our point of view with something like that is 'yes' it is worth doing. It is something of interest, and it is definitely something that is also in our minds when we are planning. I mean we are probably going to do something on a comparison between organic foods and conventional foods. Because it is really prevalent in England, but not so much here. I think also it is hard when you work at this end of the food media to realise what people at the bottom end are doing. Like I think that because I know what is and isn't in season, that everybody knows that. And I think that is a really common... I think that even though we are a top end food magazine, we still need to inform people underneath that level. It is a really easy trap to fall into, to assume that people just know.

SW: They don't, and I realise that when I teach people how to cook.

RD: I worked my way up from the lower end of things to where I am today. And it holds you in good stead because you realise that people don't know these things. How would they know? You know it is a really important function, education. We can't expect Australia to wake up one morning and everyone be supporting farmer's markets and that sort of thing.

**SW: I know. Are there any sorts of topics that you specifically won't report on?**

RD: Umm. Pre-packaged and pre-prepared products

SW: So processed, value added etc.

RD: Yeah, anything that we think is boring or overdone, like someone else bringing out another olive oil – the more mainstream products. It's amazing the stuff we get sent, you know we get sent boxes of Uncle Toby's cereal, and I just got a package today of Masterfood's mixed spices that you make tagines with, and things like that – what makes people even think that we would ever consider featuring something like that? It's that whole thing, and I tell this story to everyone, including my cooking classes, but I was in the supermarket and they sell pannacotta mix, and you have to go and buy cream and other things to mix into it, but it actually has more things in it than if you just got some cream, some gelatine, some vanilla and made it yourself. It's that whole thing of people thinking 'oh it's too hard', but it is just as easy as making it with the mix.

**SW: What about issues that you don't feature but would like to?**

RD: What we are trying to do is really push the education thing – like that whole thing about the wagyu, making accessible things that aren't accessible.

**SW: So you have just answered a question I was going to ask, which is what factors sway your editorial, but the next question is do press releases and product samples influence you at all?**

RD: No – not at all, not at all.

SW: Not even press releases.

RD: No. We tend to, we've got a really good young team at the moment, and we have the problem that we have too many stories to fit into the magazine, too many ideas to fit in. We try and balance it so that we feature you know, a couple of chefs, a couple of new restaurants. Also conscious of next getting

caught up in being too fashion-focussed driven. Not just being the fashion equivalent of a food magazine.

SW: So not too trend conscious?

RD: Yes, not too trendy, but touching on seasonal stuff, things like that. We might have a chef doing something on asparagus, or something like that. Might have a chef doing some recipes on what his granddad might have, and occasionally a dinner party theme or something like that.

**SW: What about advertisers – do they influence your editorial?**

RD: Ahhh. They don't tend to sway, well not in the time that I have been there; there hasn't been any influence on the editorial side of things. I think it tends to our tick-ons sometimes tend to be – if they want chocolate, then let's do something on chocolate – but other than, in terms of content, then not really.

SW: So if an advertisers wants an article on something, then sometimes...

RD: Yeah, and I think that the travel side is sometimes influenced by that, but not the food side, not at all...

**SW: So how do you know that you are providing readers with what they want?**

RD: They have done focus groups in the past, just before I got there they did one and a whole new revamp of the magazine. Also feed back through letters and that sort of thing.

**SW: So as you said, you often do something on social eating issues like free range chicken etc, but who instigates these ideas? Your staff? Freelance?**

RD: No, generally it would be something that the team has seen and heard about and we think 'let's do this'...definitely. We are not allowed to use freelancers.

**SW: Do you ever follow a lead from FSANZ or some like authority?**

RD: Not really.

SW: I guess that it is hardly the forum – I can't imagine you writing about BSE.

RD: Nooo.

SW: How do you see your role in reporting accurate information – I guess that you have already mentioned that you see it as educating the public?

RD: Yes.

**SW: So how do you ensure that the information is correct?**

RD: Well you try to get information from as many sources as possible, like if we are doing something on chicken, we would make sure that whoever wrote it was in contact with the meat board, a chicken person, and a few other sources...yeah.

**SW: I guess my other questions really related to your personal points of view, as well as the magazine... So issues such as childhood obesity, fad diets etc, how do you think they fit into the food media.**

RD: I think that it should be touched upon. My personal point of view is that you should just eat well, and I think a lot of these things stem from food that you are not sure what is in it – canned stuff, prepared stuff that has a lot of sugar and fat that you are not aware of. If you are actually cooking fresh foods it is a good way to counteract the whole thing.

SW: I agree with you.

RD: I think that it also comes back to the preconceptions in peoples minds as to what things are – this might be digressing a bit – but, if something thinks that they don't like something, I always say 'well, have you every had it, have you had the real thing' – anchovies, capers, olives etc.

SW: I very much agree – or they haven't had it prepared properly. Like a good white anchovy as opposed to a harsh salted one, or anchovies used well in a pasta sauce...

RD: Exactly, and I come across it all the time and I think that really food, food that is the best you can eat, is such an amazing experience and I think that a lot of people don't get to experience that. Also people's taste, what they are used to – people put things into their bodies that they are probably not supposed to, like processed spreads instead of butter.

SW: Or like spreadable cheese – have you seen that? It's disgusting.

RD: Or low fat milk which is my personal pet hate – people ask for low fat milk and then put or the sugar in, or yeah...there isn't much different. I think everything in moderation.

**SW: Do you think that consumers need to hear more, not necessarily through your magazine, but from the food media in general, on food miles and supporting farmers, genetic modification?**

RD: I think that they do, yes. Like my view is that we can't have enough farmers' markets.

SW: Yeah, do you know that they are going to have a weekday market here in the city?

RD: Oh really?

SW: Yeah, I was just at the Australian Symposium of Gastronomy and I met this guy who I got chatting to about the Farmer's Markets I saw in downtown Chicago last year and how fantastic it was to see a market everyday of the week filled with business people in ties, chefs in their jackets, all rummaging through big bales of freshly picked corn and what not. And he said 'well, I have just got approval through council to have one at Cook and Philip Park'.

RD: Fantastic.

SW: Yeah.

RD: That would be so good.

SW: He reckons by summer it will be up and running.

RD: Awesome – very exciting.

SW: I know.

RD: Because you can not buy food fresher than that. It's like, have you ever seen River Cottage.

SW: Yeah, I love it.

RD: Yeah, I love it too - it is such a great show. I grew up in Griffith. And last week I went back with a friend of mine and we made salamis and brought them back to the office, prosciutto is in the salt at the moment.

SW: wow

RD: I love that whole thing, I love that whole River Cottage thing, and most people will never get to try food like that. So, by the time it is at the supermarket, they can not keep food that fresh. It would be so great to see it go back to the little local suppliers.

SW: I know, for example you can still do that in some areas, but London you know the beautiful markets that they have in the centre of the city with the individual providores.

RD: I know – you know my personal favourite place in Australia at the moment is Tasmania.

SW: Well the next Symposium is going to be there.

RD: Have you been there?

SW: Yeah, I have, I was there about 5 years ago.



RD: Ooohhh – I love it, it's fantastic. People are doing amazing things down there. There is a guy south of Hobart doing cider, traditional Devon style cider, with these apples that are amazing. The pine forests are full of mushrooms – ohhh, people making cheese, wine.

SW: Yes – the next Symposium I think is in 2007 and it is going to, I think, bump up against the 10 Days on an Island festival.

RD: Ohh – I went to that last year.

SW: Did you?

RD: Yes, what exactly is the Symposium?

SW: Explains the Australian Symposium of Gastronomy and interview digresses while SW/RD discuss it.

RD: Fantastic, I am there – let me know when the next one is on.

SW: I will, I will.

RD: It sounds right up my alley – sorry that I have digressed.

**SW: No, no, no – me too, I am sorry to have to keep going back to such a structured interview. So, oh we were talking about social and ethical eating issues, and how your magazine is not really an outlet for such things, apart from in the form of providing some education in the way of information as you said...**

RD: Absolutely...

**SW: But, what then are the outlets?**

RD: I think that that maybe the food media needs to be educated – basically all it is someone who works for them deciding on what their content is. Umm, working in the television industry I found that there is no food...like on a food show, the people behind it are not food people. Put it this way, in magazine shoot, the people who take the photos, just do food photography – everyone involved is about food. But the producers in television are not food people, like some editors, and they are the ones that decide what to do. So, I think, I mean it is the reverse in England where food television is such a big thing. But, I think that is where it needs to change in Australia.

**SW: Talking about journalistic ethics a bit, there is a lot of comment that you can't be unbiased when reporting on food. For example when reviewing a restaurant it is hard to be unbiased about something you are experiencing.**

RD: Yes, when you are being paid to be critical – and people are relying on your opinion. So, um, I think you have to be critical.

SW: You're not alone in your opinion.

RD: Yeah.

**SW: What about freebies and junkets?**

RD: It is really hard – you try not to encourage people who send you stuff that you would never do. This weekend we were offered to fly up to this new resort, and we were never going to do anything on it I don't think, but it was to stay there, and they were telling us there were people available for interviews. And I thought, no, I can't go because I can't write about it and these people are expecting me to, and expecting something from it. You have to be really careful. We have a policy for the magazine, and ACP has a policy too on taking freebies. I know other magazines – I have heard some terrible stories about people taking free holidays. I always feel really responsible, that you have to give something back to these people when they are paying for everything.

SW: Yes...

RD: It applies to our restaurant reviews too.

SW: The travel section?

RD: Yeah, travel they do, they take them. But even then we prefer not to do junkets – they'll go on those, but if we can we try to write a story on some other aspect.

**SW: Okay, so who should be writing about food?**

RD: Well I think whoever it is they should be educated in food in some way – ahh, because I mean you read wishy washy reviews where people obviously don't know what they are talking about.

SW: Like the local papers – I can't read the reviews in them.

RD: Yeah, they just send whoever along and they say 'delicious'. But I think that it is really nice to have people who are writers coming into the industry, and people from cheffing.

SW: What about celebrity chefs when they write? Do you ghost any of them?

RD: We tend not to use them for that reason, I know other magazines do and I don't know who they get around it, but everyone we get to write for us has credentials in the writing field – even, for example, Anthony Bourdain, can write.

SW: Oh, he can – he is so entertaining.

RD: Yeah, absolutely.

**SW: Okay, what influence do you think you and the food media have on what people eat and how they eat it?**

RD: I think that it is a huge influence, like you know you hear the stories – like we put some ingredient in and it just sells out 'like that', you go to, Essential Ingredient might have something that myself or someone else in the magazines uses, and the next day it is gone 'like that'. Umm, cooking classes you do – I just did one at Simon Johnson, and they just cleaned up on products that I used in the cooking. Because people look to you in terms of 'well I should be using that because they use that', and I mean that is a trust that you can't abuse either – I think in the past Gourmet has got to be exotic for us to use it, but it doesn't. I've found that my recipes over time have got simpler – using beautiful quality ingredients that have been paired back...yeah, you know what I mean?

SW: I do, I do.

RD: I mean you shouldn't use something just because it is an expensive product and you can buy it from this exclusive delicatessen.

**SW: I agree. Okay my final question – considering how the role of the food writer has changed over the past couple of decades, and I think you summed it up when you said how food has become so popular and rather in vogue, do you think that there are clear enough ethical considerations in place in the industry?**

RD: No, I don't. Because anyone can do it, and you get these people out there who are just in it for their own personal gain, and really don't know what they are talking about. And it is really misleading to people – they may say something that is totally wrong, or they may give opinions that are not ...that don't come from the right place, they have no true passion.

**SW: Do the food media need to have their own set of ethical guidelines?**

RD: Yeah, well would it make a difference? I just don't know.

SW: Yes, not sure.

RD: It all comes back to the editor too – they say what goes in.

SW: Yes, what can you do about it? It is a difficult question.

RD: It is...

SW: Well that is about it – thank you so much for your time and candour.

**INTERVIEW CONCLUDES**

**Interview with Lyndey Milan, Food Director, Australian Women's Weekly**  
10.30am 28 July 2005

The following is explained by SW to LM:

**THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AUSTRALIA'S FOOD MEDIA**

- *My study is looking at the type of information that the food media reports. I am also interested in the changing role of the food media and how this impacts upon its role in dealing with journalistic ethics, as well as delivering true and accurate information to media consumers*
- *For the purposes of my study, I have defined 'food media' as all food related print media generated in Sydney, including publications that have national circulation.*

LM: (Sees 'conflicting messages' written on interviewers note book). Any conflicting messages have to do with nutrition, I bet.

SW: Absolutely, a lot of the time, yes

LM: I have extremely strong views on that.

SW: Good

SW continues to explain...

- *First I will ask you some questions pertaining specifically to your publication, then some on the food media in general*
- *For the purposes of my study I have classified 'consumer information' into five categories (all explained by interviewer):*
  1. *Health and Nutritional issues e.g. health risks, dietary info*
  2. *Product information e.g. general info on foods*
  3. *Skill related information e.g. recipes and cooking instructions*
  4. *Social and ethical eating issues e.g. genetic modification, organics*
  5. *Lifestyle information. restaurant reviews, "what's hot and what's not", ideas on entertaining, table decoration etc.*

- **What type of consumer information does your publication tend to report?**

LM: Well the food department of the Women's weekly, we mostly do recipes and cooking instructions. We do however have explained about organics and biodynamics or whatever – we have done that. We have a health section (which Lyndey explains she is not in charge of).

**SW: So you are really just involved in the recipes and then any information that you would give related to food?**

LM: Yes. Well, I do two things. I am responsible for the direction of the food in the magazine, and I co-host Fresh, our daily television show. I am the public face of food, really.

**SW: Is it correct that the large portion of recipes that you feature in the magazine are the ones that you would cook on Fresh?**

LM: Yes, what I cook on Fresh. Geoff (Janz) cooks different ones, and I sometimes cook out of our (Women's Weekly) cookbook.

**SW: Are there any areas of information, or any issues, that you specifically won't feature or write about? Because, I have noticed, and I think that this is probably good, that you never mention calorie count, fat content etc of your recipes.**

LM: Okay, lets start: The first thing is their... our responsibility is to our readers. It is not to anyone else, it is to our readers. That's why it is important that you are accurate, that you are honest, and that you are open. Because that is really important. You are not there to push anyone else's barrow. Yes of course we are here to make a profit and to sell a magazine, but ultimately our responsibility to our magazine. What's extremely interesting to the Women's Weekly is that trust is the most important relationship that we have with our reader. Now, mass market, normally it's viewed as mass market. What's interesting is that radio, normally, is regarded as one-on-one communication. Our readers, in a really weird way, regard the Weekly as one-on-one communication, from us to them. Even though they know it's everywhere. It's really weird. The Women's Weekly is in people's psyche, 2.8 million readers (that's the readership not the circulation – the circulation is about 730,000 a month). So, they send in,

they write in and tell us when they are getting married, they send in photos of cakes they have made, they send in photos of stuff they have made that we have given them recipes for. So, it's a very unique. It's unique in a publishing sense, not only in Australia, but internationally. So, this trust thing is really huge – if it is in the Women's Weekly, it must be true. Now, that's a huge responsibility. So we are really careful about that.

**SW: Because you are seen as less as a tabloid than say Women's Day or New Idea, you are the next step up?**

LM: That's exactly right. We are somehow more respectable, but I think that goes if you look at the front of the magazine, we don't run gossip. If we run a story on somebody, say if we run a story on Olivia Newton John, we will have spoken to Oliva Newton John – not sources close to her. So we always go right to the source, for example we have got the Prime Minister's wife to do an interview.

Food has been in the magazine since the beginning. Testing came in not that long after. The magazine started in 1933, testing the recipes, which is really key and is all about accuracy, came in about the 1940s. And, I fight for the testing of whatever, which is something that we have that no one else has. So, we take it very seriously.

**SW: So your testing is unique to any other magazine or publication?**

LM: Yes, the triple testing is unique. And we fight for it, we really fight for it. But, the recipes always work. And the way we do it through the magazine is that every recipe that is cooked for photography is cooked by the deputy food editor who is on the editorial team, which is another check for us. And we go over proofs, and over our proofs.

Now as far as nutritional information and all that other stuff. I fight against it all the time. I have come under a lot of pressure within the organisation to put it on (the recipes). But I feel really strongly about it because people don't understand. They don't understand that if they see 10grams of fat they don't understand that 10grams of fat is not very much – in fact it is low for a main course. But what kind of fat is it? Is it good fat or not? We need fat in our bodies, and people don't understand. Because the marketplace is so confused about nutrition, that the only time that we will put it on – and once again, bent to pressure – is if we have run a low-fat feature and said that 'these are all under...whatever". But I really fight against it. However, I've got to tell you cookbooks put those things in there – even on the magazine recipes.

**SW: So then they retest them and test all the nutritional contents?**

LM: They sure do.

**SW: What about issues that you would like to feature, but currently don't?**

LM: Unfortunately in the magazine at the moment there is not a lot of room for food writing, but it is also our role to present the facts in an unemotional way to our readers, and then leave them to make up their own mind. It's not up to us. So, yes, I did run organics. The definition of organic, this is what biodynamic is and whatever. But, um.

SW: Unemotional is a good word actually, and we will get on to that in a minute.

LM: Yes, because it's not the role of the Women's Weekly to actually have an opinion like that, and also, because even though you can see on the masthead, we don't actually have a bi-line on the stories. And, if someone's got a column which is under their name well then that is a bit of a different thing – if it is meant to be an opinion piece. You know there are journalists that write opinion pieces, and that's great, but that's not what we do.

SW: Okay.

**SW: What factors motivate your editorial content? For example press releases and sample products sent to you?**

LM: Yes, (pulls face)...they absolutely don't motivate me. I find food publicity is so badly done. You know you look at a food writer who will go on a trip for two days, then spend a few days writing a story and might get \$500. And the publicist who wrote the one page press release gets \$2000 which is probably completely inaccurate. Journalists, good journalists, do not write off press releases. Sadly, there's...I think if you look closely at Good Living in the Sydney Morning Herald you might be surprised to see that there is a certain person that is not terribly creative and lifts from the press releases.

SW: Mmmm. Okay

LM: Although, you might be made aware by something, for example I have been sent a couple of samples of rice bran oil. Now that is something I know nothing about, but I am interested in it. So I will go home and I will test it and whatever. Yes, in term of bring new products to your attention, yes that is good. But, by and large, press releases are a waste of trees.

**SW: Do you also find that, quite often, they are completely un-targeted?**

LM: Yes, I have been in this business a very long time, and anyone that has ever read anything that I have written would know that I am not interested in a press-release on a cook-in sauce. They have no idea. They also don't do you the courtesy of looking at your magazine, looking at your mast head, and knowing where something might fit in and what is and isn't in there. Unbelievable. And the other thing I hate is when they ring up and say 'I am ringing to see if you got the press release' or else they'll leave a message with a Melbourne return number saying 'can you ring me back to tell me if you got the press release'. No. Delete, delete.

**SW: What about advertisers? Is your editorial content influenced much by advertisers? As you said, at the end of the day you are here to make money.**

LM: Yes, yes. I personally, over the years, have come under a lot of pressure. And yes, we do. But the thing is that my brand 'Lyndey Milan' is so strong, and that the Women's Weekly brand is so strong, is that we don't compromise. I believe in providing a quality environment in which quality advertising can be well viewed. I am happy to talk to advertisers about food trends and things like that, but I've only got one thing to sell – I've got my ability and I've got my reputation, and if I tarnish those I ain't got nothing. And I am not going to do it for this organisation or anything else. But, the Women's Weekly is the same, as soon as we go down that path we loose the credibility and we loose that trust. And, I have to say, that Deborah Thomas, who is the Editorial Director is really strong on that – she is terrific. She backs me up all the time. Which is terrific. I sat around here in a meeting the other day and the advertising people were saying 'they really want this, and they really want that', and I said no, may be they could find someone else who could do it. And they say 'no, they really want you', and I said, well the reason they want me is because I don't do it. Because if I do something, I bring a lot of credibility to it.

SW: Right, and then everyone else will want you to do it too.

LM: Well, I mean, Bernard King went down that path. There are various people on television who have gone down that path, and that's fine. That's their choice. It's just not mine.

SW: Fair enough. When you develop a recipe, you don't use brand names do you? You won't say Masterfoods spices for example.

LM: No, absolutely not. That's the pressure we come under, and we absolutely won't.

SW: That's good.

**SW: Do you encourage the use of whole foods when practical?**

LM: Well, we need to be all things to all people - which is unique. Basically our philosophy is to teach people to cook. And that is what the Women's Weekly has always done. However in our current 'Make it Tonight' section (it is going to be called Weeknights), we feature fast mid week dining. There we will use short cuts. But, the sort of short cuts we use are: we might use a bottled tomato pasta sauce, but we'll add stuff to it. We do use commercial stock, and that is just being realistic. Curry pastes, stuff like that. But we always use fresh meat, and fresh fruit and vegetables. And we also make sure that we have a balance between pork, veal, lamb, vego, seafood. We also make sure that we have a balance of cooking methods too, and I ban them from using the oven in February. I also make sure that the test kitchen is realistic...I say to them that people at home don't have the luxury of someone else to shop or clean up for them, so I ask them how many pans did they use to cook that recipe? Three? Not good enough. When we do classic baking, which is really our heartland or whatever, we do things that will teach you the whole technique, or whatever.

LM: I just want to talk how we write our recipes. Now, there are some publications around that look really clean, and look really fabulous. Now I could make our recipes look like that as well, but we won't just say 'sauté an onion', we will say 'place a medium sized saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter, add the onion...' So, our method of writing recipes is very explicit because my view is that it should be as if we are standing there beside the person, and that's one of the reasons that are recipes work – is that we don't try to streamline them. We will tell you what size saucepan, and then we'll tell

you simmer covered or uncovered. We put every detail in that you could possibly want and if you have a look at a lot of modern recipe writing, it doesn't do that.

SW: Yes, from teaching people, I know that if you don't include that sort of detail in recipes people panic – they don't know what to do. They need to be told.

LM: Yes, they don't know. So that is how we write our recipes is important in terms of not being a con on the reader.

**SW: How do you gauge that you are giving your readers information that they desire? You mentioned before about letters and photos that readers send in.**

LM: Oh right, what's interesting you have to be careful in terms of how you respond. As far as I can see, we get communication from two types of people. We get a lot of handwritten letters by obviously older ladies who are just gorgeous, but then we get a lot through our website, and we get a lot through our website – we get about the same number of hits on our website as we circulation. And these people are younger. So the people that write into us, whether by email or by letter, they represent two different parts of our readership, but they are not the whole picture. The other thing we do is that I do as much public stuff that I can, partly because I am a frustrated performer and I love it, but writing or talking into a radio microphone or talking on television is not a two way communication. So, for example at the Easter Show we sponsor the Taste of Australia kitchen for fourteen days, and I am out there doing cooking demonstrations for fourteen days straight. I love it because it is not until you see the whites of their eyes that you know you have connected with them and they know what you are doing. We also get mail in at Fresh of course, and that is kind of different, that is more the young mum or uni students. Yeah, so I think when you get feedback you need to understand that it is not representative of the whole market, because most people don't write in.

SW: They'll only write in to tell you if they think you have done something wrong.

LM: That's exactly right – oh, the old ladies write in when they love things. They are gorgeous.

SW: That's sweet. That proves what you said before – it shows that you actually do have a relationship and a responsibility to them.

LM: They do. You know, I ran my Mum's Christmas cake recipe again last year, I can not tell you the response – she died four and a half years ago – I can not tell you the response I got from that.

SW: Do you actually mention that it is your Mum's recipe?

LM: Yes we call it Lyndey's recipe, but we talk about the heritage.

SW: That's nice.

**SW: You mentioned before that the magazine reports on health and nutritional issues, but that you are not in charge of these. But you do occasionally write on ethical eating issues – where do you get the ideas for these pieces, what instigates such stories?**

LM: No, no, no that was just a little piece explaining it – biodynamics and organics.

SW: Oh, but where do you get the idea to write about such things, organisations such as FSANZ or your own editorial team?

LM: No, no, no. I have been in this business for over 20 years. You've got to have a nose for it. That's what journalism is about. I am out all the time, I am out too much, I am out six nights a week. I am out all the time. I am out six nights a week. I never stop tasting, eating, looking, thinking and you've got to be out there and it has to be in the blood. You need to be out there meeting with people.

SW: Yes.

LM: So that is what we do. **But, I would love to discuss nutritional issues. Is now a good time?**

SW: Yes, now is a good time – go for it.

LM: Well talking about stuff that comes across my desk – I get all sorts of research that comes across my desk. Now, with apologies to Isaac Newton, not John Newton, every action has an equal and opposite reaction if you ask me. So, first of all you need to look at who funded the research. Now, I am realistic, I know that research needs funding otherwise it won't be done, but you really do need to look at

who has funded it. And, you've got to look at the methodology, and you've got to look at how it was done and why it was done. When I read it all, at the end of the day, I have come to the conclusion that the closer we eat things to their natural state, in variety and abundance, and with out guilt - the Lyndey Milan thing, without guilt – the better off we will be. And that is because, okay first of all we have the Mediterranean diet pyramid – oh my God, in Crete 40% of their dietary intake is fat! Oh, but its olive oil. And yet, they are really bad smokers. Oh, it's the olive oil – the Mediterranean diet, that's why they are really healthy. But what about France? They eat all that cheese, and they drink red wine. Oh, the French Paradox. Hang on, what about Asia? It's got to be all that rice they eat, they're really healthy too. Every culture, except the Anglo Saxon's has food as its heart. In Spain, you don't say hello to someone, you say 'have you eaten?' Right? So, every culture has food at its heart. France closes for two hours while everyone goes to lunch. Spain closes for everyone to go to lunch. Sadly they are getting more Americanised. But they don't walk down the street with a hamburger in their hand and a mobile phone in the other. They sit down, they eat, they drink with their meal. They gesticulate, they talk with their hands so they don't talk as quickly, and they argue and whatever, and they have no guilt around food. So I think that guilt causes stress, causes cholesterol. And, so I think the problem is the whether you've go food at your heart.

So I think, and really why I took this job in the end, because I never thought that I would, is that if I view myself as a food evangelist it is the easiest way to get to the most people. The message I want to put out is 'food is really easy, fresh food in Australia is affordable and it is accessible, and it is a hell of a lot cheaper than buying pre-prepared food'. The other reason that I have done it, which is my real bandwagon: Australian's let us all rejoice for we are young and free...we are very proud of freedom in Australia. If you are obliged to use packaged goods because you can't do anything else, you ain't free. Okay? I don't mind people having a takeaway or whatever, because they choose to on occasion. But, if they are obliged to they can't do it.

I'll never forget years ago, in fact young James Miles who has gone to Dubai but used to be a chef at the Intercon (Intercontinental Hotel, Sydney), I first taught him when he was 14 years old. I went to Pittwater House Grammar (to teach a class) and I said to the kids 'so why have you come to this cooking class?'. And two girls said 'because no one in our families cooks'. So I said 'what do you eat?' and they said 'defrosted, microwaved stuff'. Now I just find that appalling, because you don't know what's in that stuff, you really don't know what is in them. So, therefore I am, I think, the so called health industry have got a lot to answer for. And, you know it's this whole thing about functional foods – I don't want bloody fish oil added to my milk, I'd rather eat fish. And, also, I don't think that there is any long term research to show that it is going to be as affective because it seems to me, my common sense tells me, that it is things that are naturally occurring that are most effective. So, I don't want and I don't believe in functional foods. I don't believe in genetic modification. But I can't come out in a magazine and say that, but I can sure as hell make sure that none of those things appear there.

SW: That's right. Pre-packaged and value added foods – all that sort of thing.

LM: Well, you know what is really interesting is that there really is a fat-sugar seesaw, you know. And, it is really interesting because I have come under a lot of pressure to put low fat in, to put fat values into the magazine, but when Deborah (Thomas) was pregnant I said to her that the problem with low fat food, especially when it is manufactured, is that it is full of texturisers to give it mouth feel, and sugar, and all sorts of other stuff, and I really don't want to do that. And it was really funny, and when she was pregnant she was eating all this low fat stuff, but then in the end she was threatened with diabetes in pregnancy because of all the sugar. I said to her 'I told you about this'...the moment that you decrease fat intake, you increase the sugar. And, it is really interesting because I have a fat tooth, not a sweet tooth. So, I love the skin on chicken...

SW: I am the same, me too

LM: The fat on lamb...but I only eat dessert when I am judging or reviewing or whatever – I absolutely don't have a sweet tooth. It's funny...

SW: Yes I am the same, I would rather rip the skin off a duck and eat that rather than a dessert.

LM: Oh, absolutely, me too. But everybody says to me that I have so much more energy than anyone they know, but I think a lot of that is hereditary, it is also what you eat.

SW: Yes, but the sugar has such a high GI that it is burnt off immediately, but the fat takes us forever to burn off.

LM: Well exactly.

**SW: So you don't really have communication with bodies like FSANZ?**

LM: Oh, they send us stuff all the time, of course they do.

**SW: How do you consider information on issues such as childhood obesity, fad diets, and genetic modification fit into the definition of 'food media'?**

LM: Did you know that your chances of being obese as a child double – or something like that- with every hour that you sit in front of the television? Childhood obesity is the new smoking. I can tell you that, it is the new smoking. And it gives me the shits in a way, because we are seeing packaged goods that are just being repackaged. The problem with childhood obesity is, or part of the reason, is that they don't eat fresh food. It takes longer to cut up an apple or peel a carrot than it does to take a bar out of the fridge or pantry or whatever. The other problem is the whole break-down of the family in terms of sitting around the table and doing whatever. Now, I am naturally large, but neither of my children have an obesity problem because they always ate fresh food, they always had fruit and all of that stuff. It is partly to do with that, it is also to do with the fact that they watch TV, that they have remote controls, its also to do with the fact that they sit in front of the computer screen all the time, and also that too often kids aren't kids, they are young adults. So, I just think we have to be really careful how we handle it. I think parents have a lot to answer for, I think that parents have to take control of their lives and their children's lives, and they can't expect the schools to do it for them. I mean, I don't believe in picky eaters, I think there are parents who allow their children to become picky eaters. My kids attitude has always been, when something new is put in front of them, is to taste it. I'll tell you what, I presented this to a nutritionist and they said 'well I have a really healthy relationship with food, but my child is a picky eater, I've got a picky eater'. I think, well of course! Have you every seen what a bunch of nutritionists look like? They look like a bunch of stick insects.

SW: I know they are all skinny.

LM: They are stick insects. And they all are obsessed with food – they do not have a healthy relationship with food.

SW: I agree.

LM: They other thing that I have to go back to...when we were talking about non Anglo Saxon cultures eating, a nasty phrase that has crept into our language is 'meal solutions'. Now 'solution' indicates that there is a problem, now I never thought that eating was a problem and if you think about the words it is really interesting. Eating is an opportunity, it's an opportunity to relax, to talk to somebody...it's not a problem, but a solution is an answer to a problem. So I think that is really scary, the fact that that has crept into our vocabulary.

**SW: Yes, where is that coming from do you think? Advertising? Is it being pushed in any way by the food media?**

LM: Well, no I don't think by the true food writers. God there are so many things to talk about...I have just thought of something else...

SW: Yeah, well bring it up, that's fine.

LM: No, it's just that...I've forgotten. Where were we?

SW: Well, before we were on childhood obesity...so is it an issue for the food media?

LM: Well I think sadly, yes, but I am just afraid that it will become a real beat-up, that's my personal view. I am afraid it's going to become a real beat-up in the way that every other so called nutritional issue becomes a beat-up. And, you know, low fat, low carb, whatever...and children really shouldn't be on diets, and they should be drinking whole milk, and they should be...just don't give them processed shit. How hard is it to make a sandwich? Or, my daughter in the end was sick of sandwiches at school...so give them a can of tuna and some crackers and some you know, tomato. What bothers me is that we are over intellectualising things as well. And I think that parents need to lead by example. Even though I was really busy, I cooked for my kids and if I sat down to dinner with them, as a single parent, the TV was never on. My son was at uni in Bathurst and he had a really happy house, his house was legendary in Bathurst because they regarded each other as family. So they would take it turns to shop and cook, but they'd always eat together. And, it was fabulous. And then it started to fall apart when they were doing their major works...and it was because they had stopped eating together. Very interesting.

SW: Yes, it does, commensality, it brings people together.



LM: Yes.

**SW: Do consumers need to hear more about ethical eating issues? Obviously Women's Weekly might not be the forum for it, but...**

LM: I think they do, but I think they need to know the for and against. It's very, very scary. What bothers me is that no one has done a long term study that can tell you what is going to happen, because they don't know. So, the fact that genetic modification is relatively new, how do they know what effect it is going to have on us in 50 years? Genetic modification is all about companies making profit, that's what it is all about, it is not about feeding the third world, although they will sometimes say that. It is actually, if we reorganise things, there is actually enough to feed the world. So, I think we over intellectualise too much and when it comes down to commonsense my view is don't mess with it. Now other people might take issue and say what's wrong with it...but it is just my gut feeling.

**SW: Yes, things like fair trade, food miles, all those other ethical issues...how do you think that the food media can better inform the public, because as you know a lot of magazines will say, and rightly so, that they are not the forum for such issues but yes the public has the right to know about this. For example, you might be aware of the UK Food Guild, speaking with a strong voice on issues such as BSE and getting a message across.**

LM: Yes, it is extraordinary. I think because it was life threatening, and I think that in Australia we haven't dealt with anything (food) that is life threatening. And I think that we are a spread out population as well, but I think that is the issue – because it is not life threatening.

**SW: Do you think it has anything to do with the size of our food media? We don't have the available forums, or as many magazines?**

LM: No, we don't. And it seems, you know, the trouble is too much food has become a fashion. There are two things that ensure the continuity of the human race, and eating is far more accessible, you can do it every day, you can do it with consenting adults in public, you can do it anytime, but it's really interesting because it is almost like some food magazines and books have become a fashion accessory for the home. They are not actually about food they are about status.

**SW: Ethics – let's touch on ethics a little bit...journalistic ethics. We have the AJA ethics, but there is the difference is that most food writers point out that food writing differs, that food is fairly subjective. What is your opinion?**

LM: Yes, well the first thing is that your responsibility is to your reader, as I said before. The other thing is do your research – go to the source for yourself. And the other thing is that you can not be a food writer and a publicist. You can not be a wine writer and a wine publicist. And, sadly, we have those people here. And, I am sorry, putting a disclaimer at the bottom of your column is not sufficient.

SW: If they do that.

LM: Yes, if they even do that. It is a really conflict, and I take great issue with it.

**SW: And you think it is unethical?**

LM: I think that it is absolutely appalling; I think it is absolutely appalling. I also take great issue with other people, and this is very interesting, when you have a magazine or a newspaper or whatever that has a history or a culture, is out there, it has a masthead, it has bi-lines, you can see who's in it and all of that, I do take issue with certain people who make issue to set themselves up on the web as some arbiter of good taste, and I want to know where their credibility and their training and everything else are. You see, just because...or everyone thinks that they can write about food because they all eat it. You know what? I wear clothes, I don't write about fashion. I go to the doctor, I don't write about medicine. I live in a house, I don't write about architecture. Now, those of us who take it really seriously view food as a profession. And I believe that the chefs that some of us critique or whatever have every right to expect that the food media will be professional, as indeed they need to be professional. Now, I don't think someone can just think 'I like food, so I am going to be a food writer' and you see, these people wouldn't get a run in any of the major magazine's or the newspapers. So, what they do is they set themselves up on a website and call themselves some sort of expert and write appallingly, ill-informed stuff on the website. Now yes, the reader, and this is something I tried to tell my kids when they were doing research, you can't just Google something and take it as answer. But I have a problem setting themselves as food writers, without having any credentials.

SW: Yes.

LM: Without having any credentials and that's the problem because we don't need credentials that's the problem...to be a doctor or a dentist, you need credentials. And that was one of the reasons that I organised the scholarship for the Master of Arts in Gastronomy through the Food Media Club, because it is just so important.

SW: What about chefs writing? How do you feel about that?

LM: I don't like it. I must be honest. I really don't like it. First of all they can't write, usually, and they can't write recipes. But also, I am deeply uncomfortable about it because usually they are show-ponies, they may be great chefs, but often they can be show-ponies, and um, it can actually damage them as well. I mean when Luke Mangan started to write for Good Living, I knew his restaurant would go.

SW: Isn't that just the perfect example?

LM: Yes, because they are not going to pay \$40 for a main course when they see a three-bean mix on toast recipe in Tuesday paper. And I knew that it was going to happen.

SW: Poorly written as well.

LM: Absolutely, because they can't write. It is also about understanding your responsibility to the reader, and I think often it is a con. And I think what's happening is that there are plenty of really serious food journalists who have been around for years, who, like I said before, we go to things, we taste. This weekend it is Brisbane Masterclass, there is always something you are doing, you are off, you are learning, you are tasting, you are talking to other people, emailing international colleagues, but chefs don't necessarily understand that. Well, they may do in terms of cheffing, but I don't think they understand how to truly communicate with the public.

**SW: Okay, so I think that you have just answered my next question, which is what then does qualify someone to write for food, but I think you just answered that quite well.**

LM: yes.

**SW: So, going back to the ethics side of things, what about things like freebies e.g. free meals. How do you think that this applies to the food media?**

LM: Absolutely. Well first of all I am the longest surviving restaurant critic in Sydney, I started writing for Leo Schofield in the Good Food Guide, and having been doing that since 1987. You can never write about something that you have accepted for nothing. And that is what people need to understand. So, a restaurant review means that you have...well, if I book under another name and then walk in, it is obvious what I am there for. So what I usually do is, the person who I am going with, I get them to ring and book in their name. Once you get there, yes they can change your table, they can change the service, but they can't change the menu and they can't change the quality of food, and they can't change the wine list. And you should be savvy enough not to be seduced and you should be absolutely savvy enough to be able to see what's happening at other tables.

**SW: Yes, because you are a well known face – so people must be alert the second you walk in...**

LM: That's exactly right. That's what you get. And you never identify why you are there until you have paid the bill.

**SW: So you then tell them?**

LM: Well it just depends, sometime you do, and sometimes you don't. However if you are going to a wine tasting, well the wines speak for themselves, so it's up to you to then assess. But, yes accepting the invitation has given you exposure to those wines, but you need to taste them to anyway. It's not the same thing.

LM: The other thing that is a con on people – because what I do is food and wine matching, that's my thing - and I put food and wine matching in the magazine...is I hate when you go into a bottleshop and it says 'this wine goes with chicken' – I think that is the greatest con on the public. Because is it poached, is it roasted, is pan-fried, is barbecued, and if it is spiced is it a red or green curry? I hate that. I find paucity of information to be just as misleading as the wrong information, not enough information. As that is one of the challenges too, because sometimes I think that art directors do need to understand that you do need space for words.

**SW: Let's talk a bit about restaurant reviews that are clearly paid for as an advertisement. I live in an area with a Cumberland Press publication – have you read one of their restaurant reviews?**

LM: Yes. They're advertorial. Now I used to write for the Wentworth Courier. I had my first column for the Wentworth Courier, and I did honest restaurant reviews. I was the first person ever, and I don't think they have done them ever since. But I wasn't interested in doing them if they weren't, and they weren't tied up with advertising. Same with when I worked for the Sydney Weekly, they weren't – they have absolutely no value, no value at all.

SW: They are clearly a paid review.

LM: Well there is also someone who purports to be a food writer, who is in the ASTW who I know accepts free meals all the time – it's not how it works, it's not how it works.

SW: Yeah, I have heard that to, I have heard that too.

LM: Probably from John Newton, he probably gave you the name.

SW: No he didn't, he didn't he just called them the person who shall not be named.

LM: The poachy blob...that's what Margaret Fulton calls her, the poachy blob!

**SW: That's pretty funny. Now going back to the issue of conflicting messages – you think that nutritionists have a lot to do with it?**

LM: Well they are conflicting messengers.

**SW: Due to lack of space in my thesis I am only looking at print media, because I know a lot of this goes on current affairs programs and other TV, but what are your thoughts on conflicting messages and inaccurate information? Is it possible that the food media can ever put a stop to it?**

LM: Yes, well one great way of putting a stop to it, of course, is not writing about what they are ... but there is also a great interest in selling magazines and selling newspapers and selling newspapers and whatever. If you talk to Ita Buttrose, I will never forget when the Australian Meat and Livestock Corporation launched their iron campaign, and Ita got up and said 'I can't believe the diets that I ran in the Women's Weekly when I was there – I will never run a diet in another magazine again. And, I think that it is really good that she said that, I think to make people aware of the message...

SW: It is just getting that message out there – eat good food, eat whole food.

LM: Yes, cook for yourself, it doesn't take a lot of time.

SW: No, you can fry a piece of fish in 4 minutes.

LM: Yes. When you cook long and slow and share it with people you like, you get an endorphin release, and you can get from exercise and sex, whatever. But I think people like the warm cuddlies – it takes them to a time when they were warm and safe – that's why comfort food is so popular... and I think that people are prepared to spend longer (cooking). We did a thing on the website, and nearly as many people, in fact more people spent 30-60 minutes cooking each night than 0-30. It is really interesting. Food safety – we are becoming over regerminated – it is absolute crap, we need, we are breaching this – it is making people scared, and now people are becoming all scared about food again, and we don't need to be scared about food. It's not sterile.

**SW: Considering the changing definition or role of a food writer– from lifestyle reporting through to issues such as health - do you think that ethics and responsibilities pertaining to this genre need to be reconsidered, reviewed or monitored?**

LM: We debated this at length when we re-wrote the constitution for the FMC as well, um, if you are going to put something in place you actually have to have the team to carry it out.

SW: That's right.

LM: So, it is quite a complex question. We are so over regulated in our society, and you would like to think that the public was savvy enough to see who was fair dinkum and who was not, but sadly they're not. But then, am I my brother's keeper? That's a question to ask as well.

SW: It is a tough one, I know.

LM: It is very tough.

SW: I couldn't give you my opinion on it because I haven't fully formed it yet.

LM: No, either have I – you'll have to come back and ask me later. So you can call me.

SW: Thank you so much for your time.

**INTERVIEW CONCLUDES**

**Interview with John Newton**

4pm Tuesday 19 July 2005

The following is explained by SW to JN:

**THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AUSTRALIA'S FOOD MEDIA.**

- *My study is looking at the type of information that the food media reports. I am also interested in the changing role of the food media and how this impacts upon its role in dealing with journalistic ethics, as well as delivering true and accurate information to media consumers*
- *For the purposes of my study, I have defined 'food media' as all food related print media generated in Sydney, including publications that have national circulation.*

In explaining why this topic was chosen, SW explains to JN that she believes that conflicting messages within the media are causing a lot of food phobias and anxieties within society...

JN: I couldn't agree with you more.

SW: Yes and turning people away from good whole foods. That's where I came to think, hey who's responsible for this...

SW: Explains how this interview will run and how JN is freelance and will therefore hopefully be able to give a good overview of food media.

SW then explains:

- *For the purposes of my study I have classified "consumer information" into five categories (all explained by interviewer):*
  1. *Health and Nutritional issues e.g. health risks, dietary info*
  2. *Product information e.g. general info on foods*
  3. *Skill related information e.g. recipes and cooking instructions*
  4. *Ethical eating issues e.g. genetic modification, organics*
  5. *Lifestyle information. restaurant reviews, "what's hot and what's not", ideas on entertaining, table decoration etc.*

SW: You seem to write about all of the above apart from the "what's hot and what's not" – right?

JN: I do cook and I have published recipes, but it's not my main area. There are good nutritionists, but nutrition is part of the problem in a way.

SW: Yes, yes

JN: Um, I don't know quite how to ....because they tend to.... Harvey (Levenstein)... wrote quite a few books on America and food.

SW: Yes, he is quite humorous in his writing.

JN: He said the first act of the newly minted science, nutrition, the first act of nutritionists, was to tell people not to worry about eating fruit and vegetables – it was too expensive. And that was just before they discovered vitamins.

SW: right

JN: So that's the problem he says. First we have salt – salt is in salt is out. He said 'you mark my words, blueberries are going to be very big' because they have something in them...

SW: Antioxidants I think. And eggs are in, eggs are out and now they are okay again.

JN: To me that sort of thing, if you want to talk about it for a moment, that sort of thing is cultural, or acultural.

SW: Hmm

JN: To me America and Australia don't have deeply embedded food cultures...in the way that traditional food cultures do.

SW: It's a transient sort of thing (for us). It changes as we change – our culture.

JN: Yes, I don't know why. Another thing that happened to me once: I hosted a group of Los Angeles gallery directors to lunch at the Quay when Guillame Brahim was cooking there, and they were very charming. We sat down to lunch and here was this fabulous food – I mean Guillame is a great cook. And, they were presented with a menu, and they all had one response to that menu – they all started to frown. The menu was a problem to be solved, rather than a pleasure to be enjoyed. They all asked for broiled salmon with the skin off.

SW: Yeah, well they hate their skin and bone in fish.

JN: They didn't want anything. You know that is what they wanted. And I said to them, but there is great food here ....but no they weren't going to buy it. Because to them food is a problem – it is a problem for health and diet, rather than being a pleasure. I think that's why nutritionists and most of them I think (with a few exceptions, Rosemary Stanton being one) are kind of the food fascists.

SW: Yes, they are.

JN: They tell us what to eat and what not to eat and they frighten us. GI – god, do I have GI or low GI or high GI? I mean EAT WELL.

SW: *Talks about sausage debate at the Symposium of Australian Gastronomy that both she and JN were involved with (tape a little inaudible here).....starter culture in sausages, Pino the butcher in Kogarah ....leads a little into the discussion about conflicting messages from media outlets such as Today Tonight reaching the public...to which JN says:*

JN: I don't know what you can do about it – I don't think that there is anything that the food media as a whole can do because food media as a whole (as evidenced by the FMCA) is not, is NOT, speaking with a single voice – as I believe that the Food Writers Guild in England does. Because for some reason there seems to be much more of a... (looses thought) I mean the Food Writers Guild, I met the president Robert Weil, and he said it was the Food Writers Guild in England that stopped the advance of GM – because they spoke with one voice and they said 'we don't want this yet'...you know 'we may never want it, but at least for the moment we don't want it'. You wouldn't get that Food Media Club to .... I'll say, to hell with it, you wouldn't get them to agree with it.

SW: They are actually discussing this topic at Tasting Australia, and Ian Hemphill says that they will discuss it on another level year....

Tape stops because JN goes to get his Tasting Australia programme.

Interview recommences.

**SW: Are there any areas of information, or any issues, that you specifically won't feature or write about?**

JN: um

SW: besides McDonald's...

JN: Oh no, I'll write about them, there is nothing I won't write about. I did an article in the Herald on 'plating' – because there is an interesting part of food culture. There is nothing I won't write about. I won't write in praise of things I don't like.

**SW: Has the 'demand' for any of these types of features increased or decreased over the past few years? For example are you seeing more requests for articles on genetic modification?**

JN: I solicit (all my articles). The only people that commission me at the moment are Slow.

SW: So you have to pitch.

JN: I pitched, I did a story on food ethics a while ago which was timely and they loved it.

SW: Yes, I remember that – it was in the Herald

JN: I did a review of two books: the River Café Meat Book – have you read that?

SW: Yes

JN: And Charles Clover – The End of the Line, which is basically about the ethics of what we eat. For Divine I wrote a piece called “why I eat flesh?” which was basically a precursor to Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, what he put beautifully, but what I did a much longer piece on. Because these things interest me. I find it very interesting.

SW: Yes, they are very interesting.

JN: I find that you can know the whole world from the kitchen.

SW: Well you are right – the topic of food touches every aspect of our lives – even from an academic viewpoint...from sociology to anthropology to history – you name it, it touches it.

JN: Yes, everything.

**SW: I think, and I think you'll agree, that there should be more of that sort of writing out there but there is not because there is not really a form or demographic or market for it.**

JN: I don't know, I don't know what...one of the things I find a little bit interesting, or very interesting because I am a freelancer, is I am not too sure who is driving the agenda: is it that people are not interested? Or is that editors think people aren't interested?

SW: A bit of both – perhaps editors think people think are not interested or are a bit simple when it comes to these things?

JN: I just don't know. I don't think that every article should be serious. Harvey Levenstein writes amusingly about serious topics.

SW: Have you read Paradox of Plenty?

JN: Yes – that's the one I've got. I thing about a section like Good Living... the balance is good. It's not bad. They have 52 issues a year; they can cover everything from chefmania or chefaphilia to serious food issues. There is enough room to do them all.

**SW: Yes, they're lucky because they publish every week. So is there a particular type of article that you find easier to pitch or easier to sell?**

JN: Gosh, it depends on the editor really.

SW: I guess it depends on the publication.

JN: Yes. I am going to be...I am just coming back into a time when I have a lot of pitching to do, because I have just finished putting together Sydney Eats.

SW: That would be a big job.

JN: Huge. Now that is over I have to start putting together stories. I have a few stories with John (Saxby) at the moment, ummm but I mean I pitch stories I like to write.

**SW: Is your writing influenced at all by the press releases, product samples etc sent to you?**

JN: No.

SW: At all? Not at all?

JN: No. I mean if I get something that I think is really sensational, for example in the case of (shows SW a new olive oil he has discovered for \$10 at Harris Farm Markets). Having discovered that I then received a press release from them and I immediately rang them. Eventually I am going to get around to writing a story.

SW: Smells great.

JN: It's a lovely oil, and they very cleverly got the write price.

SW: Cheap

JN: They did a deal with David Harris from Harris Farms. Then shows SW another oil which smells bland.

JN: Now both of these oils arrived together. A chef friend came around and we tasted them and agreed that (the later) was no good. So, that (the freebie) won't effect me at all. If I find it is good, I'll ring them and let them know.

**SW: Do you think that (food manufacturers) send you stuff that is ridiculous and makes no sense at all sending it to you?**

JN: And I ring them up and say please don't send it again.

JN: Not that I never have written about different products – but not always in a positive way. You know, I once did a story, when I had Short Black, I did a comparison of the costs of an instant macaroni and cheese to a real one – buying the macaroni, buying the parmigiano and putting it together was a third of the cost of buying the packaged product.

SW: You did the article on organics as well didn't you? When you tried to eat organic for a week.

JN: Yes, undermined by the children, but I discovered Vegemite was kosher.

**SW: As a food writer, how do you view your role in reporting true and accurate information? How do you ensure that this information is correct?**

JN: Fact checking is really just a matter of going back and checking sources – it's like any form of journalism. You've got to be careful, especially when you're making a claim. It's got to be the journalist's role. The journalist has to deliver the copy as close as possible to the way he or she sees it being published. Of course they (the editors) are going to change it, you know. But the facts have to be checked, the names have to be checked. I am particularly bad with numbers and I have got into trouble in the paste with numbers. I am very careful with my numbers.

**How do you consider information on issues such as childhood obesity, fad diets, and genetic modification fit into the definition of 'food media'?**

JN: Again, I think it is cultural. You don't see fat kids in Europe.

SW: You're right.

JN: You see fat kids in America and they worry about nutrition more than anybody else. You see fat kids in Australia, and we worry about nutrition. So I don't know what you can write. I mean what I would say, there is no such food that is good for you and bad for you. There is good food and bad food, and you just have to learn to recognise good food from bad food. You don't need a degree in nutrition to know that margarine is bad food.

SW: That's right. It's about the push towards whole foods, fresh foods, against pre-packaged, value added, trans fat foods.

JN: It's very hard for people because they believe that they don't have the time to cook. This guy last night (at a FMCA function) said 'we haven't got the time to cook anymore' and I felt like saying, well we have the time to watch 6 hours of TV each night. We can't do anything about that.

SW: I know, it is probably simplistic to think that we can, but really only takes 4 minutes to cook a piece of fish.

JN: Don't let me lie, if you opened that cupboard you would see bottles of Coles Organic pasta sauce.

SW: Yes, well I use tonnes of tinned tomatoes and that sort of thing.

JN: Yes, tinned tomatoes, but you won't see any Chicken Tonight.

SW: Yeah, bottled simmer sauces.

**SW: Do consumers need to hear more about ethical eating issues?**

JN: I do, I don't know quite how. I don't think people are always interested because, again, we haven't got that food culture. I am concerned from what Hugh Mackay said last night, he said people will buy a product whether it comes from Australia or not – they couldn't care less where it comes from. If they buy and see it comes from product they think that's nice, but if it doesn't they think 'oh well, so what?' I am now concerned, I had a belief, and it may well be wrong that if you said 'this produce is grown in Sydney' that people would say 'I want that produce because it is grown in Sydney' – for a whole variety



of reasons, you know, social, cultural, nutritional, whatever. I don't know how you tell these things. What's the forum for these things?

SW: It's magazines that have a huge circulation, like Woman's Weekly.

JN: See Lyndey (Milan) runs food issues, she does. Not battering peoples heads with it, but there will be food issues there. And Lyndey refuses, and has fought against, the publication putting calories and fat content in recipes. She says 'no, that's bad, that's stupid you just need good food'.

SW: I am speaking to her next week.

JN: Well she is fighting a battle there because they want to put all that nutritional crap on the recipes.

SW: The scary thing is that a magazine like Super Foods magazine is by far the biggest selling food magazine in Australia – by far. And that's the type of magazine that incorporates products like Chicken Tonight into recipes.

JN: True

SW: I don't know what you can do. Where is there a forum where people will listen to you?

JN: Going back to issues like GM – that is an interesting one, I don't know whether people know or care. Australia and America are being run on greed and fear – people are working so much and are, at the same time, frightened by an abstract noun – terror. They haven't got time for reality. And reality is the food you eat. You only have to read Seeds of Doubt to realise what a scary thing this is.

SW: Oh, it's absolutely terrifying.

JN: As Rosemary Stanton says 'I am not necessarily against GM, I am just against the speed and subterfuge with which it is being introduced'. It appears now that it is just old fashioned science.

**SW: Do you think that stories like this fit into the food or the news section of a newspaper?**

JN: I wish that the Herald and the Age would survey their readers on what they'd like. But that not might work either.

SW: Explains that she has friends that love food but don't know what Food Miles mean. They read food magazines, they read Good Living etc, but because those types of article are not published in that forum they don't necessarily read them.

JN: It goes back to what Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall says about being a carnivore is that you have rights and responsibilities. If you are going to eat animals, you have responsibilities to animals. I think that is probably true about all food – if you are going to eat food. Carlo Petrini says we are eco-gastronomes.

JN: The other thing to think about is in-authentic. As soon as you begin to look at something it is no longer authentic. And in the days that we pine for in our nostalgic hearts, those Mediterranean or even French peasants didn't think about what they were eating, they just ate it. But, now you have to think about what you are eating, and that's the big change in the world. If you are going to eat you have to think about what you eat, and you have to be discriminatory, not about whether it has fat in it or not, but about how is it prepared.

JN then gives the example of the guy (at last night's FMCA function) who asked what free-range cattle meant: He hasn't got a clue about pasture fed and that's quite worrying - considering he supplies Woolworths with food lines.

SW: I know, but you are talking about a guy who supplies a company that imports asparagus from Peru in to supply our winter.

JN: And they reckon 95% is Australian grown.

SW: The whole Free Trade issue – don't get me started on that.

**SW: What other issues do you think that the food media should be reporting on?**

JN: It's not what they should be reporting on, but what they could be reporting on. I suppose my only question is – are people who read Good Living and Gourmet Traveller interested in issues as well as

recipes? I don't know. Do or should those magazines carry a certain amount of issues stories? I think so, but they don't see their job as doing that. What is the meaning of trends? What is a trend? (talking about GT agenda to set trends) I don't mind trends, but can you not see that trends can co-exist alongside information about the kind of foods that you are eating, and what goes into it and the inputs and outputs that are the important parts of eating.

**SW: What influence do you think the food media has on what and how consumers eat?**

JN: Hard to tell, are you overly preaching to the converted? I don't know. I think that occasionally someone will say 'thank you for that, that was really interesting', but then just simple things like olive oil; I often in the supermarket watch people looking at the plethora of olive oil available, and for all the words that everyone of us has written over the years I still don't think that they no the difference between them.

SW: Yes, explains that she has to explain to most of her classes the differences.

JN: So that's one example that, to me, says that I don't know if people really read (the info published). I think that they skim. Conversation then diverted on to what food publications JN & SW read. (Tape a bit inaudible here). Also talking about writing for Andrew Wood at Divine Magazine. Also talk about Jamie Oliver.

**SW: As you well know, ethics is a relevant issue for most food writers. Food is fairly subjective, so the journalists' ethics concerned with unbiased reporting are not always considered applicable to food writers. What is your opinion?**

JN: I think that's (being unbiased when writing about food) is nonsense. How can you be unbiased about a product that you're writing about which is consumed and becomes a part of you? I don't understand that. You can attempt to be, if you are criticising, you can put your criticism in context. Nigella Lawson was a restaurant critic at the Spectator. I still think that she was one of the great restaurant critics. And she would do that, she would say, 'look I don't like those big pasta things, but this is good one'. And you can't be totally unbiased.

SW: She's actually a good writer Nigella Lawson.

JN: She's not bad at all. She was a very good restaurant reviewer. So you have preference, which you do have. One of my favourite food writers was a guy called Dicky Anderson who wrote a column in the Spectator called the Imperative Cook and one of his really great lines was 'the word light conjures up everything I hate about modern food'. So there is subjectivity there. You can't be a subjective food journalist – it doesn't make sense.

**SW: What about the idea of unbiased reporting interacting with and being undermined by issues such as 'freebies' e.g. free meals, unsolicited products etc. How do you think that this applies to the food media?**

JN: I was recently invited to dinner at a restaurant, and I had reviewed this restaurant before, and the woman who owns the restaurant I have become not friendly with, but I like her, and I like her restaurant. And she invited me and a couple other people she knows to try a menu for her new restaurant. Now is that unethical? What do you think?

SW: I think that it depends on your relationship with the person and whether you are going to write about it or not?

JN: I probably won't write about the new restaurant.

SW: Right, so if you are not going to write about the new restaurant there is no harm. But, if you are going to write about it, then how do you know that you are able to be unbiased – because your food is free. Look at Cumberland Press publications – people pay to have their restaurants reviews.

JN: And a certain journalist who is a member of the FMCA writes those, and a certain journalist who is a member of the FMCA who, when she wasn't writing for Cumberland, was getting all her meals for free.

SW: Explains who restaurants have to buy an advertising package to be reviewed.

JN: This person was, I know, I saw her one night in a restaurant – the person didn't see me there, I'd snuck in very quickly and had one dish that I'd heard a lot about to write about, and this person was there being fawned over by the restaurant, and later wrote about it. And I think that is unethical.

SW: I agree.

JN: Totally and utterly unethical. I think anyone writing advertorials is unethical. They might have to for a quid, I don't know, I couldn't do it.

SW: When you read the review it is obvious that they have been paid.

JN: I have received free meals in a restaurant – but I can never right about those restaurants again.

SW: But you're very upfront about that too?

JN: Yes. Oh yeah. My only friend in the (restaurant) business is Steve Manfredi. But our friendship pre-dates my being a food writer, because we met having babies. I have a friendship with Tony Bilson – I have written about Tony Bilson, the chef, I wrote along piece about Tony Bilson the chef. But, having accepted free meals from him I can never review his restaurant.

SW: No, and you don't review Steve's either do you?

JN: No, I don't review Steve's restaurant. I will write about Steve, and I will always say or give a disclaimer that Steve Manfredi is a friend of my. It is an interesting thing. Dear ol' Gawen Rudder said 'can you look yourself in the mirror when you shaving every morning?' I don't shave, but I look in the mirror every morning, 'if you can do that then you haven't done anything wrong'. I can't think of anything that I have done that is unethical.

SW: Gawen is my supervisor for this thesis.

**SW: Considering the changing definition or role of a food writer– from lifestyle reporting through to issues such as health - do you think that ethics and responsibilities pertaining to this genre need to be reconsidered, reviewed or monitored?**

JN: Yes (the definition has changed). It's different writing about politics to writing about food – you don't eat politics. You can write about the political aspects of food. Am I an advocate or am I a reporter? I am an advocate.

SW: Mentions that the Food Writers Guild in the UK has their own set of ethics particularly pertaining to food writers.

JN: Do they?

SW: Yes. Do you think that the FMCA should have the same sort of thing, considering that is our equivalent body?

JN: Probably not because there aren't that many writers in the FMCA. I'd love to see a food media club proper. I have nothing (against the FMCA) I am a member of the FMCA, I go to some of the functions and I think that they perform a useful function, but I like there to be a food writers club – but what have we got here? Vogue, Gourmet Traveller, SMH, The Age, The Herald Sun and that's it.

SW: Hmm..

JN: In England you have a multiplicity of outlets for writers of all sorts, not just food writers.

**SW: On this note, who should be writing about food? Trained journalists, or food lovers with a flair for writing? Celebrity chefs? Food stylists?**

JN: I am a writer more than a journalist. I have never called my self a journalist because I don't write for the front of the paper – I've written a couple of things for the front of the paper.

SW: Do you think that there is a distinction.

JN: Yes. I couldn't do some of the things those people do... "what do you think of your husband being mauled by a tiger Mrs Jones" I couldn't do that.

SW: But at the same time you can write about issues that are just as newsworthy as Mr Jones being mauled by a tiger.

JN: Yes, but in a feature way rather than in a straight so called reporting way.

SW: But what about a two hundred word piece that's going to go on the fourth page?

JN: I can do that, but I very rarely do because it is too hard to get through that news thing. I have done a few news stories, but it is their province - I leave it to them. I am quite happy in the back of the paper.

SW: What about celebrity chefs writing?

JN: I hate the world celebrity chef.

SW: So do I, but that's what they are called.

JN: You can't do much about it. Some of them can write - Steve's (Manfredi) a celebrity chef isn't he? Steve and I co-wrote two books together and he doesn't need me anymore. (Bel Mondo and Fresh from the Shelves). So do I think chefs should write? Yes, chefs should write - Stephanie Alexander is a chef, Maggie Beer is a chef.

SW: But Luke Mangan is a chef and he can't write.

JN: No, he can't write.

SW: I guess it depends on who they are and if they can write

JN: Yes.

JN: I think it is arrogant of people who are not cooks to say that cooks shouldn't write. Bridgette Hafner is good - I like her.

SW: She is good

JN: I like her recipes and I think that she has a good turn of phrase. I think that Guillame is good, and is funny.

**SW: A couple of years ago, two Sydney academics wrote that food media is often viewed in "condescending ways" by mainstream media because they "don't report facts, they give opinion". How do you feel the food media, particularly in Sydney and Australia, is perceived by mainstream media?**

JN: Not anymore, I think that is changing a lot actually. When I started writing food seriously in 1991, the story I always tell is about ringing up the History Department at Sydney University and asking to speak with someone who specialises in the history of food, and they said well "what does history have to do with food, or what does food have to do with history?". And that was the period when food was seen in the Anglo Saxon as something that..... I think that one of the key books of that change is Felipe Fernandez Amesto's books Food of History. I think that there is understanding that there is (miss word) .... in writing about food, but then there is (miss word)... in writing about politics. Discusses the renowned food writers now abundant - Jeffrey Steingarten, J Apple, Edward.

JN: it's an all-consuming topic.

**SW: Most of us are aware of the abundance of 'conflicting messages' on food matters that are in the media. What are your thoughts on this? Do you think that there is any way of preventing this?**

JN: No. I think that it is probably too late to have a food culture like the country that I know best, Spain. Where it is just a part of life. I don't think that we will ever have that type of food culture. But hopefully we will become more comfortable, where we are not so subject to conflicting messages.

SW: Not so vulnerable to them.

JN: Yes, not so vulnerable, not so scared of food.

SW: It is quite sad to see people that just won't eat things.

JN & SW talk a bit about his daughters' food preferences.

SW: Thank you for your time.

**INTERVIEW CONCLUDES**

## Interview with Joanna Savill

10.30am Thursday 1 December 2005

*The following is an informal discussion between Joanna Savill and Samantha Wight, it follows a telephone conversation the previous day.*

(SW and JS discuss Tasting Australia, attended by JS, and the Food, Wine and Beer Writers' Festival. 27-30 October. In particular they discuss a panel of food professionals discussing the food media's responsibilities)

JS: The topic was responsibilities of the food media, and impartiality etc. And the panel was Ian Hemphill, Maggie Beer, Sue Bennet, and Lyndey Milan. It was interesting because, I suppose those people, of them only one...well I think only one would consider themselves a journalist.

SW: Well I know that Lyndey does.

JS: Oh does she?

SW: Yes, which I find interesting, but that is fine, but John Newton doesn't classify himself as a journalist.

JS: Doesn't he?

SW: No, but he should.

JS: As I say, it is a funny thing, because as a journalist...

SW: You are a trained journalist, yes?

JS: Yes I did a post grad diploma of journalism and trained at SBS, so I have done ethnic affairs and all that sort of stuff. Be that as it may, it is not as though you can't just become a journalist. But, I think that it is sort of...that basic training, whatever it may be, but if you think about the MEAA, which I am a member of, it's about a certain basic code of ethics, and a certain kind of training, which in the old fashioned sense it was about impartiality, and it was about getting both sides of the story, and it was about getting a news angle, and it was about research. And, I suppose in general terms, if people ask me about topics like the food media ethics, impartiality etc, I would go right back to those old fashioned principles, which is your role is to report news, your role is to research, and your role is to be as objective as you can, to be as impartial as you can, and your role is to be as ethical as you can. And, sure you can write a kind of personalised opinion piece, which is a form of journalism, which I think some food journalism is, and yes you can right a kind of puff piece which journalists do – people that do free trips and right them up etc.

**SW: What do you think of free trips? I don't mean a free trip when you have been solicited by and paid for by a magazine to travel and write a piece, but a free trip as in...**

JS: That's the crux of the kind of culture shock that I kind of underwent when I entered this arena. I entered the whole sort of food journalist thing through writing about restaurants and shops for the SBS eating guide, which was born out of me being a traveller and being a former translator, and working for SBS and being a bit of an explorer of Sydney. And it was my first foray into this kind of area, and that was pretty easy because it was very descriptive stuff, and it was based on my research, and it wasn't as if you had to take a strong position on anything one way or the other. But, growing out of that quite quickly, I discovered this whole new world to me, absolutely whole new world – I had never, ever come across it – and I was a serious news reporter for several years at SBS, and they are very, very stringent about their research and your impartiality and all that stuff. And all of a sudden people are saying 'would you like to go to Singapore for a trip?'...and your going "yeah"...and then you say 'no strings attached though', as a kind of educational, 'famil', then that is fine. And then when you come back, they would say 'where are you writing, what have you published, what are you doing?' It has got worse since then, I believe, I think now people actually have to sign contracts before they go – Sue Bennett was saying that - that she has been asked to sign things before she takes one of these trips, to guarantee that she will write something when she returns. Now, you could probably, and there are famous stories of people coming back and writing something negative, you know...what I saw, and what my true experience was...and then getting effectively black-listed by huge swayers of the PR industry, but I was absolutely gob-smacked. Particularly travel writing, it is even worse, travel writing is really, really bad. In Australia, I went to one of their Christmas parties really early on, I was taken be a travel writer, and there were little free gifts and discount vouchers on the table and so on, and people were sort of grabbing them like there was no tomorrow...it was this kind of freebie mentality that really, really scared me.

**SW: Will this culture of freebies persist?**

JS: Well, it is interesting, I mean Sue – that's what I really liked about Sue at this forum – you know, without...and I am not trying to be kind of elitist or unkind, but Sue, of the four people is what you call a working journalist. She is at the Daily Telegraph, she has been a journalist for thirty years. She outlined this whole dilemma, and she said that the situation has got to the point where people aren't disclosing things half the time...you know, 'travelled of a guest of...' doesn't actually mean something to the general public. But, she does feel that there should be some sort of disclosure, that their should be a 'buyer beware' attached to anything that is taken as a free trip, or sponsored trip. There is no way that it is going to stop...that kind of marketing, because it is just basic PR. And, I went to Spain as a guest of the Spanish Government, and I had never been to Spain, and they paid me to go for ten days. I did not write one single directly related article when I returned, but it was an absolute eye opener for me in terms of Spanish food culture. I talked about Spain on the radio when I came back, I talked about my experience...so...

SW: From what I understand Delicious Magazine went.

JS: Yes, Valli went

SW: And they wrote a huge piece, but they didn't disclose...

JS: Yes, that is very likely

SW: They didn't write that they were the guest of the Spanish Government.

JS: Good Taste also went.

**SW: If you had written about the trip you would have disclosed it?**

JS: Oh, yeh, yes, yes I was going to do a story for Good Taste on a product that they sell in the supermarket. They have a thing called 'From the Source', and if you actually get to go to the factory or farm or whatever, where this product is produced, you can then you know you are trying to follow it from it's origins to the supermarket, which, you know is fine. And, this particular product, when I went to the factory, I was so horrified by the processes and the chemicals involved – it was olives, curing olives – and just the scale and the whole environment and the responsibility of the whole thing, I just said "I can't do the story". Won't do it, because there is no way that I could write it up in a way that would make the product look good and Good Taste wouldn't have run it because it wouldn't make Woolworths look good selling that product, and but, oh boy, have I stored that one away. And, to their credit, the guys that took me (to Spain) there was pressure and I think they themselves were a little bit horrified too. And no body tried to hide anything either, they talked quite openly about the chemical processes involved, etcetera.

But it was a great fact finding thing, and I am really grateful to have had the opportunity. So I don't think that there is, in such, anything wrong with taking a trip, as long as you are clear that you aren't necessarily going to do anything out of it. And, it happens a lot with Food Lovers' Guide, we are travelling Australia a lot, and people offer us trips a lot of the time to see things and I usually take them because if I see something I like then it is great material for the future, and it's often really hard otherwise to get to that part of the world. So, that's kind of one issue, but it is almost minor, because what you are really talking about in the end is impartiality, ethics and research. It's the lack of research...that's my big bug bear.

**SW: So what do you think about the responsibilities of all that?**

JS: Well, I guess that no one is infallible and we all have our own prejudices and subjectivities and all that sort of thing, but I guess that the bottom line in all of these things is the old fashioned journalistic notion of two sides to every story. So you would always as a matter of course think of both sides when writing an article. And I, as a journalist and someone who enjoys researching, I find it immensely useful, if I am doing something on organics or organic chickens, to talk to someone who produces conventional poultry versus an organic farmer – and organic farmer will come up with all sorts of wild plans, and the organic farmer will too, but it really helps you to bounce back between the two. And people still think that there are still hormones in chickens, and all this sort of nonsense – and that kind of stuff is so irresponsible. And I find that people...look non-food journalists do it too, they work off wire copy, they work off press releases, they don't check their facts, and certainly in the food media it is no different. People don't always check their facts, they don't always go back to the source, they don't always seek an opposing view as a matter of course.

SW: Yes, you can read something on, for example, McDonalds and it will talk about how dreadfully bad the food is, but there is nothing to say that eating it once or twice a year is fine, or that they have tried to improved the health of their foods...

JS: Or just ringing McDonalds and saying 'look, what is your response' – it's just old fashioned journalism approach.

SW: But it really isn't practiced in the food media?

JS: No.

**SW: But can it be prevented? Is it a matter of educating?**

JS: Well I think the thing that Sue Bennet said is that it is very much 'buyer beware' when it comes to the food media, and that readers should realise that they are not always getting chapter and verse. But it is really hard for readers to realise that if they are not getting any opposing views, and I think what we were talking about on the phone too, is that it is frightening that there is no debate in the food media...and the notion is that people are not interested in debate, that somehow debate on food issues is not a subject for the food media, it might be a subject for a science or a health supplement, it might be a subject for a news item, but it is not the kind of thing you would find in a glossy food magazine, even in Epicure or Good Living, I think that Epicure is not bad, and Good Living is not too bad either...but they don't spend a lot of time on those kinds of stories. They might run one or two a year, which means that for people who are really interested in food there are not many outlets for food debate unless you belong to other kinds of forums.

One of my journalist colleagues in Melbourne who I was talking to about this, he said 'Joanna, the money is not there...if I were to do a debate article and ring around for three weeks etc, it's not worth it...I'd prefer to do a quick once over lightly story about the nutrients in dining'. I thought this was classic, he was really upfront about it – I mean if you are only going to be paid whatever it is per word...why bother?...it is only really staff writers', he said 'that can afford to research articles. And of course, with our broadsheet newspapers now, there is such a squeeze on staff writers that they can virtually not afford to do that kind of journalism either. So, particularly when it comes to food it seems to fall in this no mans land between hard issues – unless it's childhood obesity, or some kind of new medical break through...

SW: Or food labelling seems to be a hot topic.

JS: Yeah, food labelling is good, and it would be great to have a huge feature on food labelling, because it is an enormously important issue.

**SW: What about things like genetic modification? That's something that the public has no idea about.**

JS: They are scared.

SW: Yes, and the only things they hear are anti-GM, which is probably right, but there's no debate going on in the media.

JS: No, it all comes into the fact that there is childhood obesity/food scares/medical breakthrough, and that covers the kind of food issues (that are reported).

SW: and they are hardly ever written by food journalists anyway.

JS: No, so they are often not being researched from a point of view from someone who has a little bit of understanding.

**SW: So, do you think that the responsibility is with the editors and the publication?**

JS: Yes, because they will argue that is not what their readership wants – in whatever organisation you are in – it is very hard to argue for the kinds of stories that you might think are newsworthy. In fact, though, I don't think that you can blame one or the other side. And readers should be asking for more debate too, they should be writing letters and say that we want more on this, that or the other. Sometimes people don't like it either, because it is confronting, people find in very confronting, to have to think about these issues, and because of the news agenda, which is the kind of scare/shock horror tactics, which is kind of how news works, sadly, but because of that people are incredibly confused, and because of that it is much more comfortable to read something that doesn't confuse you. You know, I think we are all like that...once you start reading something that says 'eggs are bad for you' or 'all

children will be obese by 2020', you start feeling well, 'I just want to read a nice recipe for a yummy chocolate cake', and I think we have to look at the role that the food media does play in trying to educate people, about food -and to a certain extent there are all these fears, fads and fantasies-... but in the end, if you can encourage people to not be scared of food, and to cook, and to buy fresh food, and to have family meals, and all that 'touchy feely' stuff.

SW: Well, yes Lyndey was saying that 'teaching people to cook' is her main agenda through the magazine.

JS: Yes, and that's not to be taken lightly either.

SW: No, it is definitely one role of the food media.

JS: Yes.

**SW: So we talked a bit about food journalists/writers. But, should food writers, in terms of ethical responsibilities, be considered journalists? In view of also, that the FMCA is thinking of doing something regarding a code of ethics or whatever.**

JS: Yes, I think that is a really great idea. I think that there is a...they do have...God I should know this...but I think they have some sort of code of ethics, do they?

SW: No, they don't.

JS: They have nothing?

SW: No they have nothing. They mention the word ethics in their mission, but that is it. But (explains the Food Guild of NZ and the UK – talks about UK Guild running campaigns).

JS: I think it is great, and to their credit, I think the FMCA would be happy to move in that direction.

SW: I think they would, yes.

JS: I don't think that there is any doubt. And, I think, that the FMCA, as such has moved from being a sort of (and there is nothing wrong with it either) but once upon a time it was the food stylists and the home economists, and they didn't have to think, perhaps, as much beyond that. And, in a way, I think that is why it is a great organisation because in the end, it is bringing these opposing poles together. And I think people are very aware of the need for ethics and that sort of thing. And they have talked about things like plagiarism which affects their core constituency, or the older constituency – you know, people stealing each others recipes and not attributing. What I found interesting, it is kind of difficult to talk...and I am not sure how much of this is confidential...but I am going to be a judge for next year's media awards. And a few of us were asked to do a mock judging to get us in the thoughts of judging for them, and I was quite surprised for some of the criteria for judging, because it was based on how well written it was, and how entertaining it was, but there was nothing about research – how accurate was it. And I pointed that out, and everyone was 'yeah, we never thought about that'...and my big thing is research. I think you can talk about impartiality, objectivity and two sides to the story, but it all comes down to doing your homework. And people need to do their homework. One of the articles that we looked at last year, and again, this is kind of off the record in a way, but it was on some produce and one of the people on the trainee judging panel said 'I recognise this, because I wrote the press release'...and it was basically

SW: I have heard this...someone else mentioned it in a round about way...it was in Good Living was it?

JS: Yes - and they had basically copied the press release.

**SW: A couple of years ago, two Sydney academics wrote that food media is often viewed in "condescending ways" by mainstream media because they "don't report facts, they give opinion". How do you feel the food media, particularly in Sydney and Australia, is perceived by mainstream media?**

JS: (laughs) I have to say most journalists I know say 'god you're lucky!' - if you compare chasing Iraqi politicians in Baghdad for an interview to sitting down to dinner with an Italian family and writing about it. But, yes I do agree with the statement. But it is quite simple - it comes down to the fact that there isn't the same professional approach across the board to food writing. And I won't call myself a food writer, I call myself a food journalist and it might sound pathetic, but I do. I really feel strongly (about this)



because writer...the world almost implies subjectivity, whereas the word journalist implies objectivity. And I know that this is excruciatingly idealistic and not really true, but...

SW: You have a point.

JS: I think that because, essentially, there is this atmosphere of junket, there is this atmosphere of fluff, there is this notion of it not being 'serious' journalism. Having said that most journalists I know would much prefer to be writing features rather than news stories. Look I think that travel writing and food writing... I was asked to speak at the AJA's freelancers' conference this year, and a travel writer was asked as well. He was terrific because he was really candid about it. And I spoke about this sort of 'junket' mentality and that kind of thing, but my main point was that the food media is put into this kind of light and fluffy category, and therefore it is very hard to cross over...and that it is kind of a two way street, and that there should be more room in the media for food issues, and not just relegated to food magazines and supplements. But, interestingly again, straight after I was absolutely inundated by freelance journalists or would-be freelance journalists who want to right about food. I don't blame them!

**SW: So, who should be writing about food?**

JS: Oh, it's scary, it's really scary. What I see a lot lately is people in the food media talking about issues such as childhood obesity, genetic modification, and they themselves are very guilty for not going back to do the research, to talk to the professionals. I think anyone can write about food...look the guy next door can go to the pub and have meal and write about what he thought about it, and if it is good writing and informs you, there is nothing wrong with reading his review of the Chinese Restaurant in the Bronte RSL. Why not? But, you as a reader are entitled to know that he knows nothing, and that it was just his point of view and his experience. You see that particularly with the advertorial restaurant reviews that get published in suburban newspapers. These journalists or people get a free meal and they write a glowing review, and that's not disclosed. I think in the end the onus is on anybody writing to disclose who they are, where they are – in the copy, they don't have to put a disclaimer on the bottom – and to do their homework when it comes to backing up any kind of claims. And in the end it is up to the editor, it is the job of subs and of the editors of these publications, to make sure that the facts are checked. And that's what frightens me a lot in the food media is that facts, and even spellings and really basic stuff is not checked, often I think because they think that it is just food. And that is really frightening – I gave an interview on the phone to a newspaper journalist who's a fairly experienced newspaper journalist now working for the food section of a newspaper, and she misspelt three or four different names, including a food and place names, and stuff like that...and I thought that there is actually no excuse for that. I didn't spell it to her over the telephone, I mean she took notes...those kinds of errors, that's minor, but that's appalling. And that is what I think is happening in the end.

(SW & JS digress to talking about blogs and how inaccurate they can be)

**SW: Do you think that the emphasis for a code of ethics should really concentrate then on the importance of reporting fair and accurate information, and also maybe education of food journalists?**

JS: I think certainly a code of ethics spelling out basic principles is a good idea, and look, Ian was talking about impartiality and he said that in the end we are all partial or subjective, so you shouldn't be too surprised if you read something in the food media. But, then that's actually what journalism is about. And look, I am not being naïve, everybody knows that we all have our own prejudices and that everything is going to be subjective to a certain extent, but at least it's the research thing, acknowledging your resources and bothering to do the homework. And that's what bothers me, that people don't do their homework.

(JS & SW digress to talk about food critics)

JS: My approach (when writing a review) is to try and get a bit of a sense of the people and the context of the place, because a meal in a restaurant is a package, but is not just the food but the story that goes with that place...I try, and I don't always succeed, but I try to be generous...I try not to be too mean...because a lot of people would be happy to eat (what I might not like). But (making judgement about food) comes down to having a sort of knowledge.

(JS & SW talk more about the food professional panel at Tasting Australia)

JS: In a way I think that it was a really nice exposition of the kinds of problems that we are talking about now, the kinds of parameters that surround the whole food media industry and the kinds of obstacles there are to objectivity...and we did this Adelaide declaration that we wrote while we were down.

**SW: So what is the practical use for this?**

JS: Well as I was saying on the phone, Sue Bennett said that she managed to get it in the news pages of the DT by pushing the point of schools having responsibilities to teach children about food. The other points are sort of motherhood statements; to a certain extent...Sue was saying that in terms of getting this message beyond this forum, that's what she had to do.

SW: Yes, that's what I mean, is actually going to...

JS: Well it is probably going to sink without a trace...I don't mean to say that harshly, but within food circles it is really important, so it probably won't sink without a trace, maybe that is unfair, but it is important because Tasting Australia is kind of the only event in Australia that really brings together the biggest representation of food media, but the irony of that is too – that because it is funded we all get free trips to go – is that the Fairfax journalists don't attend because it is funded, so this is a real dilemma for these people – your two major outlets for serious food journalism – Age Epicure and Good Living, I don't think they have even touched this story. You need to have a news journo on the floor that can go back and file straight away so that they can make it into the paper the following week or whatever. So, it is very ironic, in a way. And the Fairfax journos are very conscious of this – that they can't attend this sort of thing.

SW: Because of their internal ethical code?

JS: Yes, yes.

SW: They are really quite strict on it aren't they?

JS: They are evily strict on it.

SW: With their freelancers too?

JS: Well in theory they are. I was given a job to take a chef to Paris for ten days, to eat. And I wrote about it. I was paid by his boss and by the restaurant that he works for...and when I came back the boss said 'when are you writing the article?' and I said 'I've written it, I've written it – it's for Good Living'...and Good Living really wanted the piece, and then they asked 'how did you fund all this?' and I said, well you know, the restaurant in Australia paid for me to eat in these restaurants in France. And the said, 'oh god that's a bit of a grey area'. I said 'come on...look, I choose the restaurants, we paid for every meals'...

SW: And you're not actually writing about the restaurant that paid you?

JS: No, exactly, but they said 'oh, no because indirectly it is promotion for the restaurant in Australia'. And I said that I could leave the chef out (of the article), and they said 'oh, no, we just think that it is a bit too grey', and they wouldn't run it – it was absolutely infuriating, because I wrote the story, and they only give you a fifty percent kill fee. And in that same issue there was some piece about some regional farmers' weekend or something, and I thought that, knowing the writer who did that, that it was a junket. And I did say something very pointed to the editor at the time, and he say that he didn't know it was a junket...and I said that I wasn't sure, but my bet is that it was.

(SW & JS talk about Tasting Australia, and media awards)

SW: Thank you so much for this much of your time.

**INTERVIEW CONCLUDES**

## Interview with Gawen Rudder,

Thursday 11 August, 9.15am

Gawen Rudder, Food Marketing Consultant

- Prior to the interview SW and GW talk about his work at AFA, and writing for Retail World, and his consultancy work for the primary industry area. Gawen is also a committee member for FMCA, and a restaurant critic. His primary area is in marketing planning, which includes advertising, PR, demonstrations, and positioning product. They talk about misinformation in food advertising. Part of the interview is actually the regular meeting that takes place between GR and SW, and so won't be transcribed.

**SW: Do you find that it is easier or more difficult to place information in the food media as opposed to mainstream media?**

GR: It can be quite difficult, I think that food media, as we talk about it, we think about food pages in publications, food sections, we think John Newton, Lyndey Milan, those sorts of people. But, a lot of the food information that is delivered to us comes from other people like A Current Affair or whatever, so that might come to us via the Sunday papers or whatever, where they pick up stuff from AAP to fill space. So, there is a very scant understanding, even though we have got more sophisticated about food, there is a very scant understanding about what goes into food. A lot of people are drinking Boost Juice because they think it is healthy for them – which it is because it has natural juices in it – but a lot of people would be surprised to learn that Boost and Nudie are up to minimum 60% apple juice, which is very cheap filler. But they would also be surprised if they look at the calorie figure. People don't understand the concept of this axis of evil – sugar/salt/fat. So there has been a drive by the dairy industry to reduce fat to make it more acceptable to the consumer because fat is bad, to reduce sugar using salt. If you speak to Lyndey Milan or to a chef they will say 'we use salt'...what's a food going to taste like if it is very low in sugar or salt or fat? Rubbish.

(GR & SW talk about processed foods that perpetuate the axis of evil, and how these foods, more than anything else, are the issue behind the obesity crisis in the Western World.)

GR: This latest push of the tractors in Canberra is really all about food labelling (country of origin), and they are saying something that is reasonable common sense really, and that is 'do we as consumers have the right to know where that Barramundi comes from, or where that potato comes from, or the kiwi fruit, or asparagus? Are we living in an environment where we can have any food at any time – forget about seasonality of food – 'I want a peach and I want it now'. We live in a society now... whatever we want we want it now. It is an instant society, and food seems to be a mirror of this.

**SW: How responsive are the food media to press releases? Do they tend to fact check with you when you have sent a release?**

GR: I think that they are fairly responsive, because television starts off with a blank program, and food is a popular topic. My personal feeling is that food media written by specialists in food, I think that in shirks its responsibilities when it comes to the big issues. I haven't read in any food magazine about the food labelling issues that the tractors to Canberra are talking about – it is not a popular, but shouldn't it be somewhere there? In terms of the purity of food, and organics, organics is still seen as something as a fringe topic – it still has that hippy/mungbean image, and it is rarely written about with any degree of seriousness. When you at issues, with exception of someone like John Newton, no one took on the issues of what was happening to our food through important soybeans. I actually wrote to *Good Living*, and they said 'no we don't address those issues'. If you look at the food media, I think it goes for soft issues, and it doesn't go for the hard issues. Whereas in the United Kingdom, they go for a stronger attack on the hard food issues.

**SW: I agree, and that is something that I will be addressing. (Talks about the FMCA being made up primarily of food industry members that are in nutrition, manufacturing, marketing, PR etc with some food writers.) And, in some ways this makes sense because they all contribute to generating information on food, but does this do any good in spreading the correct messages to consumers? I don't know?**

GR: I don't think it does. John Newton gets some column space, Rosemary Stanton gets space, but she wrote an article on one of the Sun Herald's weekend magazine supplement, and I'd have to guess that her article was heavily edited because they would have asked her to write about the 20 best foods...and she didn't have the space to differentiate between say, good fats and bad fats, good nuts and bad nuts. She is perfectly capable of doing that, but some sub-editor would have said 'just give us the top line'.

**SW: On this note, who should be writing about food? Trained journalists, or food lovers with a flair for writing? Celebrity chefs? Food stylists? Nutritionists? In your opinion – because everyone has had a different opinion so far.**

GR: All of the above, because we live in an era of diversity anyway.

**SW: As you well know, ethics is a relevant issue for most food writers. Food is fairly subjective, so the journalists' ethics concerned with unbiased reporting are not always considered applicable to food writers. What is your opinion? But, is there a 'fine line' between embellishing a food experience because it is a personal experience, and a food writer sensationalising a fact for a 'better' story?**

GR: I think that the way media is, we are constantly commercialising, and you can look at any paper or even at Good Living, and you can predict what they will be printing when – I can tell you that in October there will be a rash of articles about stone fruit. Where do they come from? They come from Horticulture Australia, from their PR people.

**SW: So they are susceptible to press releases?**

GR: Yeah, a lot of it is commercially placed. The Egg Corporation have been in trouble recently with placement in one of the kids' shows, they have been accused of forcing eggs on children – having someone juggling eggs on a children's show, saying eggs are fun and so forth. So, that happens, I mean the charter of the Egg Corporation is to popularise eggs.

**SW: So what do you think about this picking up a press release and re-writing, or not even re-writing it, and placing it as a story...it's lazy journalism, but do you think that this leads to inaccurate or conflicting messages in the media?**

GR: Yes it can. Some time ago I had Simon Longstaff to the FMCA to talk about things – the interesting thing is that he knows, I know, and you know that a whole lot of food writers go overseas at certain times of the year to Spain, Italy and Greece to write about olive oil, and they take the trips. Does a wine writer get free wine delivered home? The answer is yes.

SW: Yes – for example all of the wine drunk at the Symposium was given to Divine Magazine – because these wine makers want to be mentioned in the magazine.

GR: Yes, I think that is the way the world...we live in a commercial world. That's the way we work. I think the problem is that sometimes the consumer believes exactly what is printed.

SW: Well the journalist is then tempted to write a biased story, and it might not necessarily right or accurate or they are not telling the two sides of the story.

GR: And when we live in a litigious people or political correctness. I wrote a piece on the pub scene, and I mentioned that on a certain day of the week the Tilbury Hotel was a pick-up joint for gays, and the editors said that I couldn't say that. So I had to modify it so that a reader could read between the lines.

SW: Well, yes, that's an important piece of information for someone going there...

GR: Yes.

**SW: What influence do you think the food media has on what and how consumers eat?**

GR: I think that at the top to middle end, quite a bit of influence. We know that if a restaurant is reviewed favourably, the next day, the bookings are up. But that's upper and middle class – they are the same people that go to farmer's markets in the city and read Good Living.

**SW: I believe that the definition or role of a food writer has changed over the last couple of decades - from lifestyle reporting through to issues such as health. A food writer can now be anyone from a chef, a nutritionist, a journalist, a gossip columnist or even an amateur food lover. Do you think that ethics and responsibilities pertaining to this genre need to be reconsidered, reviewed or monitored?**

GR: I think that this is gradually rising to the surface – you can name the people who are influenced by unethical things. We are all influenced to a certain extent...the interesting thing was that the seminar

that we had about three years ago at the FMCA was one of the best attended events ever. We are going to do it again. I got into writing because I met Lyndey when I was translating research, and she asked me to join the FMCA, and I said 'but I'm not a journalist' and she said 'but you've got all this stuff in your head, you could write'. I would never write anything bad about Lydney because she is my friend. Then Simon Marnie, when he wants to talk about herbs on his weekend show, he'll call Herbie; if he wants to talk about social trends, he'll call me – that's sort of the way we work, but the consumer doesn't realise that.

**SW: So is it necessary to look at the ethics of what is taking place in the food media today?**

GR: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely – I'm adamant about it. We are never going to reach that area of perfection, we are never going to be unsullied or pure, none of us are pure.

**SW: So that would lead me to believe that you think that the food media, not just those in the FMCA, but the food media in general, have a responsibility?**

GR: They have a total responsibility – because 'we are what we eat', which is re-quoted every 2 ½ days...but, we should know and we should be informed – people are now more interested where their food comes from, they are reading labels, and that's why farmers' markets are so important, because they are the exact opposite of a supermarket.

**SW: Would more ethical journalistic practices do anything to prevent conflicting or competing messages being sent by the food media to the general public?**

GR: It will go some way but in a perfect world we would be back to 'mother knows best'...commonsense.

SW: But that has gone by the wayside.

GR: Commonsense has gone by the wayside.

SW: Yes, well I think that is about it – thanks so much for your time.

**INTERVIEW CONCLUDES**

## Interview with Clare Hughes

2pm Monday 17 October 2005

The following is explained by SW to CH

### **THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AUSTRALIA'S FOOD MEDIA**

- *My study is looking at the type of information that the food media reports. I am also interested in the changing role of the food media and how this impacts upon its role in dealing with journalistic ethics, as well as delivering true and accurate information to media consumers*
- *For the purposes of my study, I have defined 'food media' as all food related print media generated in Sydney, including publications that have national circulation.*

CH: ACA is the wider organisation. We produce Choice Magazine, so effectively we are the same organisation. I guess most publicly we are known as Choice Magazine. But ACA does have a policy/lobbying arm.

SW: Yes, I noticed that on your website. So do you do both?

CH: Well I do the media for the magazine, the food stories, and I work quite closely with the content team so they know policy work I am doing and I am always reading the drafts of their articles – we all sit together when we are coming up with ideas. I work quite closely with the team, but I don't write the articles.

SW: Okay.

SW then explains:

- *For the purposes of my study I have classified 'consumer information' into five categories (all explained by SW):*
  1. *Health and Nutritional issues e.g. health risks, dietary info*
  2. *Product information e.g. general info on foods*
  3. *Skill related information e.g. recipes and cooking instructions*
  4. *Social and ethical eating issues e.g. genetic modification, organics*
  5. *Lifestyle information. restaurant reviews, 'what's hot and what's not', ideas on entertaining, table decoration etc.*

SW: Your magazine is subscription only, so I haven't really had a chance to look through it in much detail.

CH: No problems...I will give you some copies etc.

SW: That would be great. Thank you.

**SW: But, I am presuming that you pretty much cross all of these categories, apart from Lifestyle information?**

CH Not so much 'skill related information', recipes.

SW: I noticed that you had some recipes on your website, so they are not included in the magazine.

CH: No, no, and they're not really an emphasis of the website.

**SW: So, out of all of these categories, are you heavy on any of them? When it comes to food do you tend to report more on one than the other?**

CH: Well, I guess what would be of interest to you to know, when we survey our subscribers, consistently, of the top 5 issues that they tell us they are interested in, comes: nutrition, food safety, and food labelling – then the others are medium appliances and small appliances.

SW: Amazing

CH: yes, so if you think of all the things that we cover – we look at cameras, appliances, everything. For three food issues to consistently rank in the top five... It's a different story when you survey the online subscribers because we do have online subscribers, but we are not really talking about them are we?

SW: No. I haven't really looked at Choice for a few years now purely because of subscription only, but when I need the info I do go online.

What is the demographic of your subscribers?

CH: I will find out.

SW: Thanks – don't go to any trouble, but if you can find out that would be great.

**SW: So you also do Choice Health Reader?**

CH: Yeah, that's a little bit different, that's actually outsourced and produced by someone else. Our layout teams compiles it, but our in-house writers don't actually write it, it's more collating studies that have come out or something. I think it is bi-monthly.

SW: It is purely health? Any nutrition?

CH: Oh yes, I think in the most recent one there is something on obesity, so it does cut into the topic of food, but on a more nutritional aspect.

SW: Okay.

CH: It is really just a snap shot, in consumer language, of recent findings.

**SW: Great. Are there areas, pertaining to food information, that you won't write on in Choice?**

CH: We're not here to promote anyone.

SW: No, because you are entirely independent.

CH: Yes. I am a big purchaser on food magazines myself. And sometimes I think 'oh wouldn't it be good if we could do an article about this...' but we don't do an article like an article on eggs and how to use them. It's more about when we are buying eggs, what are the issues consumers possibly don't know about. I guess we are not just a food magazine, obviously.

SW: No, you're not.

CH: We provide a different type of information. And sure some food magazines might go into detail, for example the differences between free-range eggs and regular eggs.

SW: Yes, you're very much an objective voice. And that, I guess, is why I wanted to speak to you because there is not really another magazine that touches on the things you do.

CH: No.

SW: How long has Choice Magazine been in publication?

CH: 50 years.

**SW: Even over the past few years, has the type of information that you report about food shifted?**

CH: I guess that there has been a shift away from food safety and more on food labelling on nutrition. While it's still an interest to people, it is a matter of coming up with some new things that we can report on.

If we need to do some kind of microbiological analysis, we can't just (do it), we need to actually have a feeling of what we are going to find. For example, barbecue chickens, someone that we should be doing some micro-tests on them because they thought there were problems because they were actually testing for industry themselves. So we sort of went out and did our own stuff and actually came back with nothing. So we have to, to some extent, there has to be something that we need to find out.

**SW: Interesting, because you and I talked briefly about A Current Affair/Today Tonight, it is something they would love. But being a consumer association, you really need to back your findings, or substantiate them?**

CH: Definitely. But also, I think that the shift away from food safety has something to do with the fact that we are kind of getting food safety under control – there are still going to be the dodgy ones. So I guess that there is now more onus on consumer issues such as labels etc. Particularly now that there are so many products making health claims that they can do this for you or that, consumers now need to be a bit more label savvy. That sort of leads to food labels and nutrition being a bit more popular.

**SW: Yes, and what about ethical eating issues, are they something that you are reporting on more and more?**

CH: Yes, genetic modification, organic, free trade though is not something that we have touched on, but general animal welfare, country of origin I guess. Consumers purchases aren't just based on safety, price and taste anymore – other things are coming into it and those, while every consumer doesn't care, but there are some that certainly do. Perhaps our subscribers tend to fall into that category more than other consumers.

SW: They are savvy consumers so to speak.

CH: Yes, in some ways we are probably preaching to the converted.

SW: But they want to know about it?

CH: Yes, but also we media release a couple of Choice magazine articles each month, so we release an article, it gets it being discussed in the media so whether or no people subscribe to the magazine people might still find out about it. For example, our story about breakfast cereals saying that kid's breakfast cereals are not that good in fibre, too much sugar, too much salt – that gets picked up and discussed a bit more.

**SW: What instigates or motivates the issues that you report on?**

CH: I guess a few things. We have a consumer services department that receives calls, and we get feed back from their database quite regularly. We are all pretty savvy food people with back ground in food technologist – I am a nutritionist not a technologist – so I guess part of it is trends that we see in the marketplace that we think we need to be keeping an eye on. Also people writing in to suggest stories.

**SW: What kind of interaction do you have with say FSANZ?**

CH: ACA sits on a number of their development committees, we provide submissions to any of their processes to change standards etc.

SW: Are you speaking with the consumer's voice when you do this?

CH: Well we are consumer advocates, not necessarily consumer representatives. So we are not necessarily a view, like we are representing every single subscriber, but we advocate with the consumers' issues mind, ensuring that their interest are taken into consideration. In some cases we do survey consumers, and we did it in relation to genetically modified foods. That helped support our position in relation to the labelling of GM foods. So we can do it, but we can't afford to do it all the time.

**SW: Do you fact check and what not with FSANZ?**

CH: Yeah, in some cases, for example when they did some good labelling research.

**SW: What about interaction with Greenpeace?**

CH: Certainly in relation to GM. But we do have to limit our involvement with them because we are two very different organisations. They are very focused on the GM food issues, where as GM is only one of many food issues we work on. When it comes to GM food our position is not for or against GM food as such, but we believe that consumers need protection and that they need to be able to choose. So, we focus a bit more now on labelling (of GM foods).

**SW: You don't advertise in Choice do you?**

CH: No.

**SW: How do lobby? For example food labelling issues?**

CH: We will involve ourselves with FSANZ as the consumer advocates Explains process....explains process – not transcribed as thought to be irrelevant to thesis.

**SW: How do distribute the information through media. Obviously through press release, but...**

CH: Yes, through press release, but we have a general media list that also receives Choice Magazine as well. So they will go to radio station, regular newspapers, television.

**SW: How receptive are the media to your press releases?**



CH: It varies depending on what it is.

SW: Do you find that, say, newspapers are more receptive than television or...

CH: I think as far as Choice Magazine is concerned we get a lot of radio. It possibly gets picked up by radio more. But also the radio we do get is often influenced by what's in the paper, for example you might get an article in the SMH and that may be read by the people at the radio station and so on. I would have to say that we get more radio than print. Not every one of the main papers would necessarily cover a story from us. I often wonder how they (newspapers) pick which food stories to run – they don't want to go near political stories.

SW: Well, no they don't.

CH: Where as other print media are quite cheeky – we have a policy where we ask them not to name brand names, for a couple of reasons – defamation one, but also I guess when it comes to our food information in Choice Magazines, it is all free on the website. But, when it comes to washing machines, dishwashers that sort of thing wouldn't be free. And our subscribers get quite annoyed if they're paying for information, and then they see it in the Daily Telegraph or someone has actually printed the table. The problem also is sometimes the papers, when they do this, they pick and choose, and they will say 'Choice thinks that this is the best', and they take it out of context.

**SW: Do you send to food magazines when you press release for ACA?**

CH: I don't know that we do specifically because generally only one or two would report something like that. Generally, given that we do generate a bit of media on our own... I mean that they are probably a competitor, not a competitor, but one magazine to another and some people don't want to quote another magazine. But I have seen a quick grab about something that we have done. I think it was Super Foods.

SW: What is your circulation?

CH: I'll find out – about 170,000 I think.

**SW: When you do send press releases, do you find that the print media will fact check with you?**

CH: They tend to just print from what they get.

**SW: So you don't get a lot of calls from journalists?**

CH: No, I do, I do but some that want to do a more inquisitive article will want to speak to someone in the food industry, or a regulator. But about 50% will go further and want to do an article.

SW: Obviously when you send information out to media it can get misconstrued. When this does happen, who is responsible for it? Is it the people publishing the information? Obviously defamation is always a concern for you.

CH: *Explains that sometimes they will call a publication and point out the mistake, and sometimes ask them to retract, but most will never retract anything. (not quoted – tape inaudible here)* If something is really, really incorrect and poses a public health risk then we probably would (make them retract) but generally speaking we don't take much action.

CH: That is difficult too. I mean there is so much nutritional information going around. We did something in the last issue of Choice, and we looked detoxing or detox kits. We spoke to dietitians and gastroenterologists and that sort of thing and asked 'do you need to detox' and 'are these kits going to be of any use to us?'. And, basically we found that 'no, our body is perfectly capable of detoxing, we should probably think about what we are putting into it. But of course there are still people who will say 'no, we need to detox'. They are the kind of issues that we do tend take up – the ones where we think 'God, everyone is talking about detox'...these are the ones we think we should be looking into. In relation to nutrition you've also got high protein vs. low carb etc.

**SW: How do you make sure that the information you publish is correct?**

CH: We have a lab that we use. A lot of our information is based on food labels. We have a verification department, and a legal department...so many people go through the drafting process but then we have a verification department that will say 'show me your evidence'. We haven't been successfully sued – they've tried.

SW: That's probably because you strictly report just the facts.

## **Who writes for you?**

CH: We have a team – explains that they are all qualified.

**SW: What do you see as the consumers' rights to information?** For example BSE in UK. Even if the info is just in early stages?

CH: you obviously don't want to release information that is going to cause unnecessary anguish and panic, and be taken out of context and that also comes up to the risk communicators and how they phrase the message. I don't think that you can always say that we don't want to release it because it causes unnecessary concern. I think it is often the concern of, say, food authorities to ensure that that information is released in a responsible way. And it is also up to the media to be responsible about how they report things, but of course, that doesn't always work. Disclosure is what is going to protect the industry and the government as much as it will cause unnecessary anguish, just by being up front and honest and saying this is what we do know and what we don't know, this is what we are going to find out, and this is what you need to know in interim. I think that it undermines the authority and organisation if they say 'don't worry about it, it's all under control, there's no problem'...that undermines the organisation if they are not prepared to give true information – consumers are a bit smarter than that.

**SW: Well, yes. What do you think is the right platform for say ethical eating issues? For example, New Idea writing on GM.**

CH: Well they did. I think that she regretted it in the end – I think that she thought it was more trouble than it was worth. Once you get talking to all the relevant people – you've got us, you've got the government, you've got Greenpeace, the companies. And then the advertisers that are supporting GM.

SW: Well that's why a lot of them won't touch it – advertising income.

CH: I don't think that they will go there again. But, at the same time, that sort of publication could be somewhere where you could give consumers the basic facts.

SW: Because it is going to reach people.

CH: Exactly. But also, you don't have to put a spin on it – you can say these are the arguments for, these are the arguments against and you decide.

SW: you can be unbiased.

CH: Yes, because that's the problem as well, when you look at this particular example I really think that they consumer voice has been lost in relation to the GM debate because of the (don't quote me on this) pro-GM propaganda and the anti-GM hysteria means that basically it has become so polarised that it's not about consumers in the middle anymore, it's about people who are against the technology vs. the people who really want to push the technology. And it's not really about either.

**SW: I agree. Looking at other ethical issues, for example organic, free-range...**

CH: Once you give them the information they are able to make an informed choice, it gets them thinking about it – how much it's going to cost, the taste.

**SW: What influence do you think the food media, including Choice have on what consumers eat and buy?**

CH: I think Choice would only have an impact mainly on the subscriber base, but once again if we get the issues discussed in the media, then it gets people thinking about what they are eating and they'll go to the website and have a look. So once again we have a broader reach that just those people who subscribe to the magazine. I guess we're also asked to comment as experts, in the media, so you might have Rosemary Stanton or myself, those sorts of people. But I think that food magazines, and newspaper supplements, they direct people a bit more in what they want to eat. So that can drive them in what they want to eat, rather than us who helps them make a choice.

**SW: A couple of food writers have pointed the finger at nutritionists as being the people who are getting people scared about what they eat. Maybe this is because nutritionists, generally, specifically report the facts only, as opposed to food writers. For example, a lot of foodies will say 'eat what you feel like' and then a lot of nutritionists will voice up and say 'well look really if it's been heated to high temps or whatever you should be aware of trans fats etc.**

CH: Exactly. I think with some of the print media (like Donna Hay, Super Food and Delicious) tend to stretch across a broad range. Often the higher end are about indulgence and you know...make your mashed potatoes with cream instead of skim milk, something like that. It's about the quality, it's about the experience not necessarily about the nutrition.

SW: Donna Hay probably wouldn't touch on low fat too much, but I know Delicious does.

CH: Yes, I think that there is always one issue that is dedicated to low fat (September or December).

SW: I agree there are some magazines that provide a forum for low fat and some, for example Vogue, would never touch it.

Well that is about it, thank you so much for your time.

**INTERVIEW CONCLUDES**

## **7.2 Copies of E-mails with International Food Media Associations**

## Samantha Wight

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**From:** Jill Brewis [jbrewis@iprohome.co.nz]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 22 November 2005 12:24 PM  
**To:** Samantha Wight  
**Cc:** Andre Taber  
**Subject:** NZGFW code of ethics

Dear Samantha

It's good to hear of your interest in the activities of New Zealand food writers. We have a lively Guild with branches throughout the country. The Guild's aim is, briefly, to educate, support and promote members as professional food communicators. The Code of Ethics is attached: it doesn't mention the fun and socialising that happens on a regular basis.

You asked about the food forums. To date we have had sessions on topics such as copyright, publishing and the seafood industry. The stated objectives of the forums are:

1. To learn - to introduce members to new knowledge, to reinforce, update old knowledge - whether through ostensibly 'fun' activities like wine and cheese evenings or 'serious' activities like copyright workshops.
2. To inform - to give members the opportunity to access a wide range of information and opinion. (For example, at the copyright seminar, everyone was very honest and open about their experiences - a healthy sign that people wanted to explore the subject as deeply as possible.)
3. To develop networks - to give members a chance to get to know each other while sharing knowledge on a set topic.

The forums have developed very informally, and certainly do not attempt the lofty goals of the UK GFW.

I would be interested to hear any further comments or findings you may have. Good luck with your Masters.

Kind regards

Jill Brewis

President: NZ Guild of Food Writers Inc.

2 Woodside Crescent

St Heliers, Auckland 1005

New Zealand

Phone +64 9 575 6989

Fax +64 9 575 6916

## Samantha Wight

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**From:** Jill Brewis [jbrewis@iprohome.co.nz]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 22 November 2005 2:40 PM  
**To:** Samantha Wight  
**Subject:** Re: NZGFW code of ethics

Hi Samantha

The Code of Professional Ethics was drawn up soon after the Guild was formed in 1988. If my recollection is correct, it was developed on the advice of the lawyer who was assisting the Guild draw up its Constitution.

The Code of Ethics was published in the Guild journal in 1996 but I think it was in existence some years before this.

There is an Ethics Committee comprising two members. This committee is independent of the Guild executive committee and as an independent body has had matters referred to it for clarification. Its findings are confidential.

One of the greyest areas for food writers is that of copyright of recipes. Our members are well aware of the fog of plagiarism and, I believe, actively avoid it.

The Code of Ethics may not actively discourage unethical food journalism but it does serve to provide ethical guidelines relating to the activities of food writers belonging to the Guild.

I hope this provides some answers to your questions.

Jill

Jill Brewis

President: NZ Guild of Food Writers Inc.

**Samantha Wight**

**From:** Silvija Davidson [silvija@btinternet.com]  
**Sent:** Friday, 16 December 2005 9:20 PM  
**To:** swightx2@bigpond.com  
**Subject:** aussie food media

Dear Samantha

Colin as asked me to comment on the Campaigns section of your enquiry, as I was most recently Chair of the Guild's Food Policy Committee (I ended my tenure earlier this year). I'm not sure if you're receiving in html or plain text - am replying in green under each query. Hope this helps

best wishes,

Silvija

Silvija Davidson  
12 Lords Close  
West Dulwich  
London SE21 8JH  
Phone/Fax 020 8670 6184  
Mobile 07740 940919

### Campaigns

1. I understand that you run educational campaigns (for your members) so that members speak with knowledge and also a united voice of issues of importance such as GM. Is this true?

That's putting it a little too ambitiously. We do run Conferences every 3 or so years, and follow these up with a report. GM was the topic of one such. In the case of GM, we did additionally run a series of workshops; and as our website developed a little I added a small stream of up to date news on GM issues from a diverse range of sources. I would also occasionally post to the food forum - as would other members - and this would generate a limited amount of discussion. We also published items on the topic in the monthly Guild Newsletter (and still do, on quite a range of food policy issues). I'm not sure this actually amounts to an educational campaign; and as for a united voice, I don't believe we've achieved that on any single issue, at least not in all its ramifications.

2. I noticed that the Guild has a 'food policy' agenda. Do you also campaign or lobby the government or authorities on certain issues such as food labelling? Are these campaigns run via published articles (i.e. the power of the media), or is the Guild actively involved in drafting documents and face-to-face lobbying?

We have run what we consider Campaigns; food labelling is one of these - quite a sustained one. Other letters to government and authorities have covered issues of GM and children's school food provision and advertising issues. But we are a volunteer organisation of working people and cannot take the time required for a truly high powered campaign. The Guild is a member of the umbrella organisation, Sustain, which has paid staff and campaigns and lobbies very effectively. We respond to their consultations, and sometimes expand on their drafted documents using them as a model for our own. So we add our voice to their well targeted campaigns. Additionally, a number of members' work touches on areas of Food Policy, so they can both inform the Guild of their perceptions, concerns and activities, and also use the support of the Guild where appropriate in their individual campaigns.

3. Do you think that providing this type of education to members has helped in lifting the quality of food journalism in Britain?

No, the power of the corporate controlled media is much too great. Having said that, it's difficult to say for certain what principally prompts the fairly widespread imparting of information on provenance of food and sustainability issues. Have concerned Guild member journalists provoked the concerns or simply responded to public demand? I'd like to think the former, but suspect that food scares and fears for food security have been the real driving force, tying in with readily adopted sensationalist stories, and thus considered acceptable by Editors in Chief.

4. Can you give me an example of how this has helped to communicate the facts of a food-related issue to the public? For example the recent issue of Sudan dyes in the UK, or the past issue of BSE?

Again, I could be wrong but don't think our investigation of topics has actually shaped media communication of food related issues. We've certainly debated the ones you mention quite widely, whether through workshops, the forum, or online information (I quizzed the Food Standards Agency on various aspects of the Sudan dye issue that did not appear to be covered in the press, and posted them where appropriate). But I guess our investigations helped members make up their own minds on what they felt the gravity, causes and ramifications of these issues might be, and of course a number of them would be quizzed by the public - perhaps in the context of a food dem at a fair, for instance - and would then communicate the fruits of our investigations and their thoughts on the matter.

I think, in sum, that most Guild members are pretty food policy aware (though to be so at great depth would require full time research of the issues) - it's virtually impossible for them to ignore this aspect of food provision. But I'm not certain that our voice per se is particularly powerful when it comes to influencing legislators, and I suspect we make only a tiny impact on mainstream media reportage. However, when added in support of campaigns by Sustain (and other consumer organisations), and in response to consultations by government bodies (principally the FSA) I imagine that it does have some impact, particularly on those issues where we feel confident of the support of the majority of members (children's food provision, for example).



## Samantha Wight

---

**From:** Spencerhist@aol.com  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 13 December 2005 4:05 AM  
**To:** swightx2@bigpond.com  
**Subject:** Re: Australian Food Media

In a message dated 6/12/2005 22:22:37, swightx2@bigpond.com writes:

<< 1. Why did the Guild of Food Writers decide to develop ethical guidelines?

There was a solid caucus of eminent food writers with the Guild who were pressing for some ideal statement to show where we stood in today's society. Our first President, Derek Cooper and members like Professor Tim Lang, Geoff Tansy, Professor Eric Millstone, Lynda Brown and many, many others. I formulated the ten without much trouble and then sent them around to a few chosen knowledgeable people. I accepted a few small changes of wording. But it went straight to the executive committee and was passe unanimously.

2. When were they developed? 1998

3. What process did you undertake to development? For example, who did you consult? Were members consulted?

The ethical guidelines then went to the membership at the AGM, there was little discussion and again it was passed unanimously.

4. How did you implement them? For example did you hold a seminar for members? >> I can't say whether the statement has helped or invigorated the political consciousness of food journalism. I hope so.

Dear Samantha, I've answered the questions above. I've sent the rest of your email on Campaigns to Silvija Davidson who heads one of our sub-committee on Political Issues, which is called something else now. She, I hope, will answer these questions for you.

This all seems a bit sparse. But I hope Silvija will be perhaps more informative. Best wishes, Colin Spencer



### **7.3 The Declaration of Adelaide**

## **Declaration of Adelaide on the Future of Food**

We the undersigned food professionals express our deep concerns about the future of food and agriculture in Australia, and about the well-being of the population and the implications of increasing obesity.

Gathered here at the Adelaide Food Summit organised by Tasting Australia`

WE THEREFORE DECLARE:

1. Access to safe, wholesome food in adequate quantities is a basic human right, and governments must accord high priority to giving force and effect to this right.
2. Public food policies and programs, such as in schools and hospitals, should be encouraged to include fresh, local, minimally-processed and seasonal foods.
3. Promoting sustainable agricultural practices and preserving cultural and biological diversity are essential for the health of the planet and its inhabitants. To this end, governments should support sustainable, small-scale agriculture on the fringes of large population centres, and protect other threatened farmland.
4. Food producers should be appropriately rewarded for adopting and maintaining practices conducive to long-term sustainability.
5. It is essential that children learn at an early age about food production, flavour, food preparation and food culture; and about the impact of their food choices upon their well-being and that of the environment. All schools have a responsibility in this.
6. Governments need to adopt the precautionary principle in respect to new technologies associated with food.

### **SIGNATORIES**

K. Dun Gifford, President, Oldways Preservation Trust, Boston, USA  
Jane Adams, Chairman, Australian Farmers' Markets Association, NSW  
Stephanie Alexander, food writer, Victoria  
Maggie Beer, cook, writer, food, South Australia  
Antonio Carluccio, TV presenter, broadcaster and food writer, UK  
Ian Hemphill, President, Food Media Club of Australia, NSW  
Gina Mallet, author of Last Chance to Eat, Canada  
Lyndey Milan, Food Director, Australian Women's Weekly, and TV presenter, NSW  
John Newton, journalist and author, NSW  
Jill Norman, food writer, UK  
Ian Parmenter, Festival Director, Tasting Australia, WA  
Cherry Ripe, food writer and author, NSW  
Associate Professor Barbara Santich, Graduate Program in Gastronomy, University of Adelaide, SA  
Joanna Savill, journalist and TV presenter, SBS, NSW

### **ADDITIONAL SIGNATORIES**

Tamara Rubanowski, Editor, Essentially Food, NZ  
Jason Mumford, Chef, Couran Cove Is Resort, QLD  
Justin Harris, Chef, Moorilla Estate, Hobart, TAS  
Iain Todd, Chef, The Henry Jones Art House, Hobart, TAS  
Andre Kropp, Chef, The Henry Jones Art house, Hobart, TAS  
Natasha Harris, Maitre D', Ruby Chord, Hobart, TAS  
Kaylene Murray, Editor, Noosa Style Magazine, QLD  
Tom Murray, Food photographer, QLD Style Magazine, QLD  
Averill Chase, Food and Wine Publisher, Sydney, NSW

Matthew Curtis, Food writer, VIC  
Carol Ritchie, Cookin' with Carol, Texas, USA  
Gillian Carter, BBC Good Food, UK  
Lauraine Jacobs, Cuisine Magazine Food Editor, NZ  
Lynne Mullins, Food Writer/Presenter, Sydney, NSW  
Faye Lablet, CEO Food Circus, QLD  
Chris Stephan, The Food Studio Director, Adelaide, SA  
Julie Ray, Food Stylist/Home Economist, NSW  
Lachlan Bowtell, MLA, Sydney, NSW  
Allie Reynolds, Cook/Food Commentator 891 Adelaide ABC, Adelaide, SA  
Genevieve Harris, Chef/Food Writer, Adelaide, SA  
Howard Twelftree, Adelaide Review, Adelaide, SA  
Rosa Matto, Rosa Matto Cookery School, Adelaide, SA  
Ragim Dey, The Spice Kitchen, Adelaide, SA  
Jan Darling, Teacher, Cavan Education Country, SA  
Belinda Hanson-Kenny, Food Technologist Balfours Pty Ltd  
Margaret Kirkwood, Freelance Home Economist, QLD  
Jill Stone, Herb Grower, Adelaide, SA  
Liane Colwell, Exotic Catering & Liane Colwell Communications, Sydney, NSW  
Cassandra Stokes, Television Food Freelance, Sydney, NSW  
Colin Comey, Tasmanian Wine Education, TAS  
George Ujvary, Director Olgas Fine Foods & Consultant Foodology Consulting  
Helen Ujvary, Business Development Manager Olgas Fine Foods  
Margaret Brooker, Food Writer, NZ  
Bruce Guerin, Radio Adelaide, SA  
Benedict Beauge, Food Writer/Author, FRANCE  
Sophie Grigson, Food Writer & Broadcaster, UK  
Liz Hemphill, Director Herbie's Spices & Writer  
Barbara Lowery, ABC Radio  
Julie Biuso, Food Writer/ Author, NZ  
Catherine Bell, Food Writer/Editor, NZ  
Christine Manfield, Chef/Author, Sydney/London  
Maeve O'Meara, Gourmet Safaris SBS TV & Channel 7  
Kingsley Sullivan, Artisan Baker, New Norcia, WA  
William Studd, Master of Cheese, VIC  
Greg Malouf, Chef Momo Restaurant, Melbourne, VIC  
Christine Austin, Wine Writer, Yorkshire, UK  
Shannon Bennett, Chef Vue de Monde, Melbourne, VIC  
Margaret Johnson, Food Editor The West Australian  
Gavan Disney, TV Producer  
Elaine Reeves, Food Writer The Mercury, Hobart, TAS  
Rebecca Skinner, Editor Australian Wine Selector  
Damien Pignolet, Chef/Author  
Roberta Miur, MA Gastronomy & Manager Sydney Seafood School, NSW  
Ernie Whalley, Editor Food and Wine Magazine, IRELAND  
Rachel Ankely, Masters Student & Senior Lecturer University of Sydney  
Tania Cammarando, Masters Student & Journalist, NSW  
Alexandra Peters, Masters Student  
Christine Salins, Food Writer  
Gabriel Gate, Food Writer  
Darren Simpson, Chef/TV Presenter, NSW  
Geoff Lindsay, Owner/Chef Pearl Restaurant, VIC  
Helen O'Neill, Journalist/Food Writer Weekend Australian Magazine, NSW  
Kay Richardson, Director Children's Food Education Foundation, NSW  
Vinod Advani, Food and Wine Writer Times of India, Verve, MW, INDIA  
Simon Marnie, ABC Radio Broadcaster, NSW  
Peter Forrestal, Wine Writer, WA  
Dorinda Hafner, TV Presenter/Author/Food Anthropologist

## **7.4 The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance Code of Ethics**

# Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance

## Code of Ethics

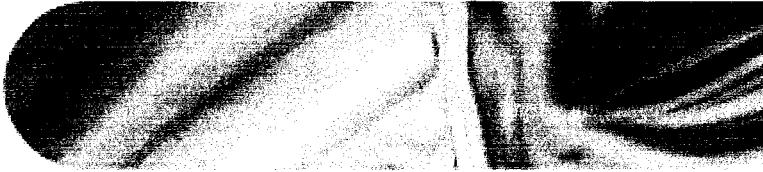


MEAA members engaged in journalism commit themselves to

- Honesty
  - Fairness
  - Independence
  - Respect for the rights of others
1. Report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts. Do not suppress relevant available facts, or give distorting emphasis. Do your utmost to give a fair opportunity for reply.
  2. Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability.
  3. Aim to attribute information to its source. Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source's motives and any alternative attributable source. Where confidences are accepted, respect them in all circumstances.
  4. Do not allow personal interest, or any belief, commitment, payment, gift or benefit, to undermine your accuracy, fairness or independence.
  5. Disclose conflicts of interest that affect, or could be seen to affect, the accuracy, fairness or independence of your journalism. Do not improperly use a journalistic position for personal gain.
  6. Do not allow advertising or other commercial considerations to undermine accuracy, fairness or independence.
  7. Do your utmost to ensure disclosure of any direct or indirect payment made for interviews, pictures, information or stories.
  8. Use fair, responsible and honest means to obtain material. Identify yourself and your employer before obtaining any interview for publication or broadcast. Never exploit a person's vulnerability or ignorance of media practice.
  9. Present pictures and sound which are true and accurate. Any manipulation likely to mislead should be disclosed.
  10. Do not plagiarise.
  11. Respect private grief and personal privacy. Journalists have the right to resist compulsion to intrude.
  12. Do your utmost to achieve fair correction of errors.

## **7.5 The Australian Copyright Council Information Sheet**





AUSTRALIAN  
COPYRIGHT  
COUNCIL



# INFORMATION SHEET G19

## *Recipes: legal protection*

July 2005

In this information sheet, we outline some issues you need to understand if you want to copy other people's written recipes, or protect your own recipes.

For information about our other information sheets, other publications and training program, see our website <http://www.copyright.org.au>.

**The purpose of this information sheet is to give general introductory information about copyright. If you need to know how the law applies in a particular situation, please get advice from a lawyer.**

We update our information sheets from time to time. Check our website to make sure this is the most recent version.

### Key points

- The written form of a recipe is likely to be protected by copyright, once it is recorded in some way, for example, written down or recorded onto a tape.
- Copyright does not protect information about the ingredients or methods of making a type of food or drink. You will not need permission to follow a recipe.
- You will not infringe copyright if you watch someone prepare a dish and then you write down the ingredients and method in your own words.

### Copyright protection

#### How does copyright affect recipes?

Copyright protects a range of materials, including works comprising words—such as written recipes, setting out a description of the type and amount of ingredients and the method for making the type of food.

Other things protected by copyright include "artistic works" (such as drawings and photographs), music and films. For more information about what copyright protects, see our information sheet *An introduction to copyright in Australia*.

#### *What are the copyright owner's rights?*

The rights of a copyright owner in a recipe are limited. The copyright owner cannot prevent people from making the dish, or from writing their own descriptions of how to make it. The copyright owner has the right to control the use of the written recipe in particular ways, including:

- reproduction (for example by photocopying, copying by hand, scanning, copying a digital file, or printing out a digital file);
- communication (by faxing, emailing or broadcasting it, or putting it on a website); and
- translation into another language.

## What is not protected by copyright?

Copyright does NOT protect:

- ideas (such as the idea of using blue cheese to make ice-cream);
- information (such as the list of ingredients and quantities used in chocolate chilli mud cake); or
- styles, methods or techniques (such as a method of preparing chicken and casserole).

Therefore, if you watched someone preparing a dish they had created and then wrote down in your own words the ingredients and method, you would not have infringed copyright even if they had not granted permission (although you might infringe their rights under other areas of law, as discussed below).

## How do you get copyright protection?

For work to be protected by copyright, it must be “**original**”. In this context, an “original” work need not be novel or unique, it simply must result from the exercise of skill or labour on the part of its author. A work that is merely copied from an earlier work is not protected.

Copyright works are only protected by copyright once they are put into **material form** (for example, by being written down, saved as a digital file, or recorded in audio or audiovisual form).

Therefore, if you write your own description of how to make a soufflé, this “literary work” is protected by copyright, even though you did not invent the combination and proportion of ingredients and the method is not new.

However, merely following a recipe (for example, by making a cake) does not reproduce the recipe in material form.

There is no system of registration for copyright protection in Australia. Copyright protection does not depend upon publication, a copyright notice, or any other procedure—the protection is free and automatic. However, it is a good idea to use the “copyright notice”. This is simply a statement in the form “© J. Oliver 2005” which is written on physical copies of the work. Although it is not necessary in order to get copyright protection, use of this notice alerts the reader to the fact that the work is protected by copyright and the person named claims to be the copyright owner.

## How long does copyright last?

Until 1 January 2005, copyright generally lasted for the life of the relevant creator plus 50 years. There were various exceptions to this rule, including:

- where a work was not published, performed or broadcast during a creator’s lifetime; and
- where something was published anonymously or under a pseudonym, and the identity of the creator couldn’t reasonably be ascertained.

(In each of these cases, copyright lasted for 50 years from the end of the year the work was published.)

Under the Free Trade Agreement with the US, Australia agreed to extend the general duration of copyright. As a result, the general rule now is that copyright lasts for the life of the creator plus 70 years (or, where duration depends on year of publication, until 70 years after it is first published).

However, the Free Trade Agreement did not include any obligation to **revive** copyright if copyright had already expired. This means that if, under the old rules, copyright had already expired by 1 January 2005, it stays expired, and the material can be used freely (at least within Australia).

For detailed information on duration in Australia, see our information sheet *Duration of copyright*.

## Who owns copyright?

The general rule is that copyright in a work is owned by the author of the work. The situation may be different if the person created the work as part of their job, or assigned copyright (for example to a music publisher). For further information, see our information sheet *Ownership of copyright*.

## When do you need permission to reproduce a written recipe?

In general terms, you need permission to reproduce written recipes, unless one of the exceptions to infringement applies. For information on these exceptions, see our information sheets *Fair dealing*, *Educational institutions*, and *Governments (Commonwealth, State and Territory)*.

For example, if you photocopy a written recipe or put a digital file of it on the internet without permission, you may be infringing copyright.

Copying part of the instructions may also infringe, if the part is important. A part may be important even though it is not a large portion of the original. If the way in which instructions have been expressed is highly original, then copying even a small part may infringe copyright. On the other hand, if a work is very simple, copyright is unlikely to be infringed unless the work is copied exactly or very closely. You will not necessarily avoid infringement by making changes.

## Moral rights

Creators of copyright works have moral rights in relation to the works. These are the right to:

- be attributed as the creator of the work;
- not have the work falsely attributed; and
- not to have the work treated in a way that prejudices the creator's honour or reputation.

In relation to recipes, these rights apply to the person who created the literary work constituted by the written instructions, or the recorded description of the dish or how to prepare it, not to the person who invented or prepared the dish. For further information, see our information sheet *Moral rights*.

## Other areas of law that may protect recipes

### Confidential information

If you want to prevent other people making food products from a combination of ingredients and/or method devised by you, you may need to keep this information a secret. For example, the manufacturers of the soft drink Coca Cola have kept secret certain key ingredients to protect the product from being copied by competitors.

If someone tells another person secret information on a confidential basis, and the second person passes on the information without permission, the owner of the confidential information may be entitled to make a legal claim for breach of confidence. To succeed, he or she would need to show that:

- the information is confidential in nature (information that is trivial, or is public knowledge, is not protected);
- the obligation of confidence was made known and accepted at the time the information was disclosed, or was implicit from the context; and
- there has been an unauthorised use or threatened use of the information.

Employees will generally be bound to keep secret any confidential information they acquire as part of their jobs. Similarly, if you engage a manufacturer to manufacture a product on your behalf, a duty of confidence is likely to be imposed on them.

If possible, it is a good idea to keep written evidence of the fact that the idea or information was communicated in confidence. This may be, for example, by exchange of letters or an acknowledgment which the person to whom the idea is communicated is requested to sign. However, there is no legal obligation to sign such a document and people such as publishers who are commonly offered such material may decline to do so.

For further information, see our information sheet *Ideas: legal protection*.

### Passing off

If you represent a recipe you have invented as being associated with someone else's name (including a brand name) or image, you may be breaking the law of "passing off", which protects business reputation or goodwill.

## **7.6 Code of Professional Ethics of the New Zealand Guild of Food Writers**

## NZGFW CODE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

This Code of Professional Ethics has been developed to promote and maintain high standards of professionalism within the New Zealand Guild of Food Writers.

Professional members of the NZGFW must undertake to:

- Support the growth of knowledge and free interchange of ideas within the profession, respect the views and opinions of colleagues and accept their right to express them.
- Strive to achieve and maintain excellence in the field of food journalism and allied occupations.
- Improve standards in all areas of food writing.
- Accurately represent professional training and qualifications and maintain high standards of accuracy and honesty in all professional dealings.
- Not publish or knowingly permit to be published, any material, be it advertising, promotional or other, which contains false, deceptive or misleading statements. (Be cognisant of current consumer and advertising laws as they relate to food writing.)
- Respect the intellectual property rights of others and not knowingly use or appropriate to financial or professional advantage, any recipe or other intellectual property belonging to another without proper recognition. (Be cognisant of current copyright law as it relates to food writers – written word, photography and graphics, advertising and promotional material etc.)
- To be actively involved in the promotion of good food practices and maintain up to date knowledge of health and nutrition.

## **7.7 Ethical Guidelines of the Guild of Food Writers**

### **United Kingdom**



# THE GUILD OF FOOD WRITERS

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## Ethical Guidelines

Members of the Guild of Food Writers have a duty at all times to:

- Strive to achieve the highest professional standards in his or her work, and to be polite, fair and honest in all dealings with colleagues and clients.
- Refrain from any behaviour which would discredit the Guild or any member thereof.
- Respect the implications of copyright infringement and plagiarism\*, and not knowingly use for financial or professional advantage any recipe or other intellectual property belonging to another without appropriate acknowledgement.
- Be especially aware of the detailed ethics of recipe acknowledgement, regardless of whether publishing, demonstrating or teaching, and to make clear to editors that such acknowledgement is mandatory.
- Endeavour to ensure that any recipe published under his or her name has been thoroughly tested, and within reason, will work as written.
- Endeavour to ensure that any work published in his or her name is fair and accurate, and that comment and conjecture are not presented as established fact.
- Not publish, or knowingly permit to be published on his or her behalf, any advertising or promotional material which contains false or misleading statements.
- Deliver work on time, or provide fair warning of unavoidable delay, recognising that if a deadline is missed, it is not only his or her work that may be affected, but also the work and schedules of others involved.
- Be familiar with fundamental food safety regulations, and adhere to them if involved in demonstrating, teaching and catering.

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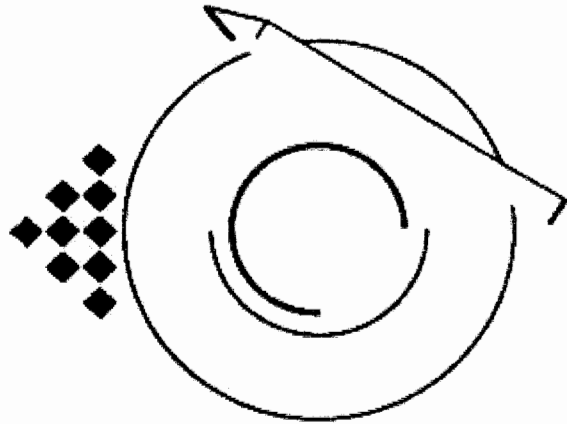
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The Guild of Food Writers  
9 Colman House, High Street  
London SE20 7EX  
tel: 020 8659 0422  
Administrator: Jonathan Woods

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## **7.8 Code of Ethics of the Association of Food Journalists**





# Association of Food Journalists

A Web site by and for professional food journalists

## CODE OF ETHICS

The Association of Food Journalists recognizes that its members, like all journalists, should meet accepted standards of professional responsibility.

The Association subscribes to the traditional Canons of Journalism of the American Society of Newspaper Editors and to the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi.

The Association believes that the primary responsibility of food journalists is to serve the public interest by reporting the news accurately and as objectively as possible.

The Association further believes that essential to this commitment is the absolute separation of editorial responsibilities from the influence of a media's advertising departments.

To assure their integrity and preserve their credibility, members therefore accept the following standards:

(1) Gifts, favors, free travel or lodging, special treatment or privileges can compromise the integrity and diminish the credibility of food journalists, as well as that of their employers. This includes commercially sponsored contests. Such offers should be avoided. An example is a contest promoting specific food products that is open to food journalists only.

(2) Similarly, food journalists should not use their positions to win favors for themselves or for others.

(3) Secondary employment, political involvement, holding public office or serving in organizations should be avoided if it compromises the integrity of a food journalist.

(4) Because the editorial space allotted to food journalism is not an extension of advertising, brand names or names of specific companies or interest groups should be used only in a newsworthy context or for purposes of clarification.

(5) Food journalists should use their bylines only in conjunction with material that they have written. Material from other sources incorporated in a story should be credited.

(6) To assure accuracy, so-called news communications or press releases should be substantiated.

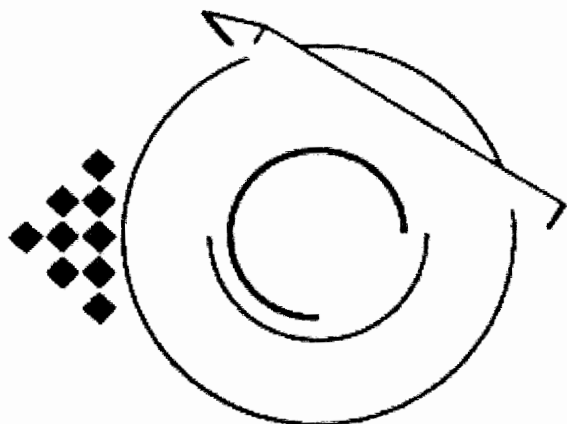
(7) Expression of opinions, editorials or special articles devoted to the writer's own views should be clearly labeled as such and thus easily distinguished from the news reports.

(8) Because of the controversial nature of many food-related topics, food journalists accept the obligation to acknowledge opposing views on such issues.

PLEDGE: The Association of Food Journalists encourages observation of these standards by all newspeople. The Association further urges news media managements to support the decision by food journalists to uphold this code.

END

**7.9 Ethical Guidelines for Food Critics of the  
Association of Food Journalists**



# Association of Food Journalists

A Web site for and by professional food journalists

## Food Critics' Guidelines

### *Introduction*

The following guidelines for restaurant critics and/or reviewers are just that — guidelines suggested by the Association of Food Journalists. They are not intended to be rules that will be enforced by the Association of Food Journalists. The guidelines are provided to food journalists and their employers who are interested in ethical industry suggestions for reviewing restaurants.

### *Ethics*

Good restaurant reviewing is good journalism. Reviewers should subscribe to the same accepted standards of professional responsibility as other journalists. That means adhering to the traditional Canons of Journalism of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, and the Code of Ethics of the Association of Food Journalists.

Given the prominence — and controversy — inherent in reviewing, it makes sense to check first when confronted with a doubtful situation. Consult the various ethics codes or talk to an editor. The Association of Food Journalists also serves as source of advice and support for reviewers who are members.

### *Anonymity*

Reviews should be conducted anonymously whenever possible. Critics should experience the restaurant just as ordinary patrons do. Reservations should be made in a name other than that of the reviewer and meals should be paid for using cash or credit cards in a name other than the critic. Take care to make reservations from telephones outside of work; many restaurants have caller identification systems. Just because a workstation telephone has a "blocked" telephone number doesn't mean the call won't be tagged as coming from the publication. Reviewers who have been recognized may want to make note of that in the review, especially if the treatment they receive differs markedly from what nearby tables are receiving. While anonymity is important when dining out, reviewers should write under their real names, not a pseudonym. Readers should also be able to respond to the reviews; a work telephone number or e-mail for the reviewer or the supervisory editor should be included with the review.

### *Multiple Visits*

Two visits to a restaurant are recommended. Three times are better. Service, food quality

and atmosphere can vary, sometimes quite dramatically, from day-to-day. Multiple visits give the critic a better understanding of the restaurant, helping him or her to more accurately gauge its rhythm and spirit. Try scheduling visits so the restaurant is observed on a weeknight and a weekend. Lunch on a Monday can be vastly different from a Saturday night dinner, for example.

### ***Ordering***

Reviewers should sample the full range of the menu, from appetizers to desserts. Reviewers must taste everything ordered, or at least all the items they mention in a column. Bringing guests along helps the critic by allowing the table to order a greater variety of dishes. Two or three guests per visit are probably the most manageable. Besides being fun, having guests along better replicates the dining out experience. Order dishes that involve different cooking techniques (steamed, deep-fried, sautéed); different ingredients (one orders fish, another asks for beef); different styles (something traditional, something eclectic). Is there something the restaurant is known for doing well? Order it. In general, guests should avoid ordering the same thing. Order different dishes on return visits. It's a good idea, however, to do a repeat order on a dish that is particularly wonderful or terrible to see if the experience is consistent.

### ***Payment***

Pay in full for all meals and services. Don't accept free meals or use gift certificates donated by the restaurant or a special-interest group. Publications should strive to budget enough money for restaurant visits so the reviewer can do the job without having to resort to personal funds to help pay the bill.

### ***Variety***

Reviews should reflect the full range of a region's restaurants, from neighborhood haunts to luxury venues. Offer readers dining choices in a variety of price ranges, cuisine, neighborhood and style.

### ***New Restaurants***

To be fair to new restaurants, reviewers should wait at least one month after the restaurant starts serving before visiting. These few weeks give the fledgling enterprise some time to get organized. If, however, a restaurant must be visited because of timeliness, enormous reader interest or journalistic competitiveness, consider offering readers "first impressions." This piece should be more descriptive than critical, avoid labeling it as a review if possible. The emphasis of such a sneak preview could be on the fledgling restaurant's clientele, its decor and maybe the chef's background rather than a blow-by-blow account of the menu (though food would, of course, be mentioned.)

### ***Ratings***

Ratings should reflect a reviewer's reaction to menu, atmosphere and service. Cost should also be taken into consideration. Have a sense of what a star or other rating symbol mean. Here are some definitions to consider:

- **FOUR STARS:** (Extraordinary) Transcendent. A one-of-a-kind, world-class experience.
- **THREE STARS:** (Excellent) Superior. Memorable, high-quality menus frequently accompanied by exciting environs and/or savvy service.
- **TWO STARS:** (Good) Solid places that beckon with generally appealing cooking.

- **ONE STAR:** (Fair) Just OK. A place not worth rushing back to. But, it might have something worth recommending: A view, a single dish, friendly service, lively scene.
- **NO STAR:** (Poor) Below-average restaurants.

Although most readers have a sense of what the stars mean, every review should run with a box explaining the ratings.

### ***Changes***

Some restaurants get better, some restaurants get worse. A critic should have some sort of mechanism in place to make note of these changes. A full-blown re-review is appropriate if the restaurant changes hands, wins or loses a high-profile chef or moves to a new location.

### ***Negative Reviews***

Negative reviews are fine, as long as they're accurate and fair. Critics must always be conscious that they are dealing with people's livelihoods. Negative reviews, especially, should be based on multiple visits and a broad exploration of the restaurant's menu. Following a consistent reviewing policy without deviation may protect a critic from charges of bias or favoritism, while providing a platform from which to defend the review.

### ***Fact Checking***

Follow basic journalistic precepts for accuracy. After finishing the review, telephone the restaurant and double-check the spelling of the name. Confirm address, telephone number, credit card policy and what types of alcohol are served.

### ***Wearing Two Hats***

Restaurant reviewers who double as food editors should try to keep the two roles as separate as possible. Food editors who are reviewers should avoid writing stories about restaurants, restaurant owners or chefs. It may be hard for a restaurant owner or chef to speak as freely as he or she should if he or she harbors some resentment because of a review. Conversely, owners and/or chefs may try to be extra nice in order to win a favorable review in the future. If possible, utilize another employee or freelancer to do those stories. If personnel or budget constraints preclude another staff member tackling these stories, try to obtain the information over the telephone rather than in a face-to-face interview. Also, try to steer clear of interviewing the staff of restaurants that have been recently reviewed or are on the immediate reviewing schedule. Critics should avoid functions that restaurateurs and chefs are likely to attend, such as grand openings, restaurant anniversary dinners, wine tastings or new product introductions.

### ***Freelancing***

Many restaurant critics do the job on something less than a full-time basis. While a number hold other jobs with their employers, there are critics whose only link to a publication is the restaurant review. Here are some questions freelancers should consider before accepting an assignment.

- What is the policy on negative reviews? Does the publication expect only "puff" pieces?
- Will the publication support the critic if a restaurant dislikes the review? What if the restaurateur threatens a lawsuit? Will the publication give out the critic's home telephone number and leave him or her to fend for themselves? Or, will the publication field calls and defend the reviewer?

- Does the reviewer get to write under his or her own name or a pseudonym?
- How many times is the critic expected to visit a restaurant before writing a review?
- Who selects the restaurants?
- Does the publication have a policy about reviewing restaurants that are also advertisers?
  - Are any restaurants considered off-limits, i.e. chain restaurants?
  - Does the publication have specific guidelines (food quality, service, attitude, price) that must be followed in evaluating the restaurant?
  - Is there a policy on how many people a reviewer can take along to a dinner? Do guests need to pay for their own meals?
  - Does the publication pick up the tab? Is there a cap on how much a reviewer can spend on the meal? Will the publication pay for alcohol? Does the reviewer have to use a personal credit card or pay cash?
  - Will the critic be paid a salary plus meal reimbursement or just meal reimbursement?
  - Will the reviewer receive mileage?
  - How long must a reviewer wait before getting paid? Will the publication pay for credit card late fees or interest charges if the reimbursement is not timely?

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