



AN INTERVIEW WITH BLAIR WILLIAMS:
PUBLISHER OF ANGLO-INDIAN LITERATURE AND FOUNDER OF
CALCUTTA TILJALAH RELIEF (CTR), AN ANGLO-INDIAN CHARITY

Interviewed by Rudy Otter

Blair Williams, international Anglo-Indian philanthropist and publisher, is a well-known figure in the Anglo-Indian community. Mention his name and people will say "he's the guy who does a great of charity work for disadvantaged Anglo-Indians, young and old, in India." So concerned was he about non-Anglo writers stereotyping the community with negative images that he resolved to do something about it by setting up his own publishing company, CTR Books, in the United States where he lives. His aim was not only to set the record straight by portraying Anglo-Indians fairly and accurately but to send proceeds from the books to his India-based charity helping Anglo-Indians in India. Here he talks about his life and books to Anglo-Indian journalist, columnist and fiction writer RUDY OTTER.

OTTER: Blair Williams, you moved into book publishing for a special reason. What were you doing previously? Please explain.

WILLIAMS: I was Director of Materials Management for AT&T. When I retired in 2000 I looked around for something to do for the rest of my life! I asked myself a question "How will the Anglo-Indian community be remembered by posterity?" The answer was not reassuring as the only information on the Anglo-Indian community was written by English or Indian authors who resorted to negative stereotypes to describe the community. There was a dire need for a more balanced view of the community and I decided to publish a series of books on Anglo-Indians to meet this need.

OTTER: How easy or difficult was it to set up publishing in the USA?

WILLIAMS: Not too difficult. I bought ten ISBN numbers, established a printer and then decided on themes that would be the basis of the proposed books.

OTTER: How did you organise the business?

WILLIAMS: After I selected a theme for a book, I set up some basic conditions such as length of articles, subject matter and submission dates. Using the internet I invited articles from anyone who wanted to write on the theme. I also established an international panel of five judges for each book and an editor (one of the judges). Typically I allowed a year for submission of articles. All submissions were emailed to me. I removed their identity, gave them a number and sent them to the judges. Only after the judges had agreed to a final selection did I reveal the authors' identities. This took about two months.

The finalized list was sent to the editor for editing. The manuscript was then put in a form acceptable to the printer, checked for errors and formatting and uploaded to the printer's website. Proofs were checked, approved and the books printed. The editing and printing took about four months. So the whole process ran for 18 months. I paid for all costs associated with the publishing and then donated the books to a charity I had formed to help Anglo-Indians in India called CTR <http://www.blairrw.org/ctr>. This resulted in the gross proceeds from the sale of all books going directly to fund the charity.

OTTER: Was publishing your full-time occupation?

WILLIAMS: No. I had started to teach in a university while engaged in publishing.

OTTER: How did you make your presence known as a publisher looking for Anglo-Indian authors?

WILLIAMS: Apart from the internet I also had an extensive list of authors as I had

attended several International Anglo-Indian reunions. I also had a website where anyone who was interested could submit an article.

OTTER: What terms did you offer to authors whose work you accepted for publication?

WILLIAMS: For the initial books I offered an honorarium of \$35 USD to authors whose work was selected.

OTTER: How much editing was necessary and did you do this work yourself?

WILLIAMS: No I had a designated editor for each book. The editing was at times difficult, but I made it clear that the editor had the final say in the matter and if the author disagreed strongly with the edits they could withdraw their article. Thankfully this happened only twice.

OTTER: What percentage of books did you reject, and why?

WILLIAMS: Typically we received around 100 submissions and selected around 40. The judges, all of whom had literary credentials, made the selections.

OTTER: You published eight books in total about the Anglo-Indian community, written by new and established Anglo-Indian writers. How well did the books sell?

WILLIAMS: Two of the first four are sold out and the other two are steadily following suit. The last four are still selling.

OTTER: Why did you stop at eight books?

WILLIAMS: Through the eight books I felt I had established a third and more balanced point of view on the Anglo-Indian Community. They were published between 2000 and 2015.

OTTER: How will your departure from publishing affect your charity work for needy

Anglo-Indians in India?

WILLIAMS: Whilst the sale of the books help the charity CTR it is not the principal means of fundraising. The charity has branches in Australia, the UK, Canada and the East and West USA, all of which raise funds for CTR. The charity is still continuing strongly in 2017.

OTTER: What advice would you give to people wishing to move into book publishing?

WILLIAMS: Have a vision, pursue it with passion and do not get frustrated. It helps to have connections and financial resources. In my case financial return was not an issue, but I can see the need for profit in commercial publishing.

OTTER: Do you think there might be a time when you decide to resume publishing books?

WILLIAMS: No. I am now done as a publisher!

OTTER: If you are familiar with the Indian publishing scene, how well do you think it is making its mark internationally?

WILLIAMS: I think it is doing well and I get several books from Indian publishers.

OTTER: Did you ever think of linking up with a publisher in India to give your books a higher profile?

WILLIAM: Yes I am in touch with Harry MacLure of *Anglos in the Wind* (angloink.com) to reproduce those books that are going out of print.

OTTER: Who is your favourite Indian author, and why?

WILLIAMS: Jhumpa Lahiri. Her heroes are ordinary persons and she imbues them with extraordinary virtues, capabilities and frailties. In this manner she honors us

humans as extraordinary creatures who do not need exaggerated embellishments (as in most of fiction) to appreciate and acknowledge our uniqueness.

OTTER: Where could people buy your books? And what are their titles, please?

WILLIAMS: They may write to me at blairrw@att.net. Shipment abroad (from the USA) is as expensive as the book, so it helps to have a contact in the USA. Books may also be bought from the website <http://www.blairrw.org/ctr> and they are also sold on Amazon. Here are the details:

Publisher: CTR Books, PO Box 6345, Monroe Twp, NJ 08831, USA. (current prices in USD)

Books:

Anglo-Indians Vanishing Remnants of a Bygone Era – Blair Williams
(2002) ISBN 0-9754639-1-8 Price \$ 10.00

Haunting India – Margaret Deefholts, ed. (2003)
ISBN 0-9754639-2-6 Price \$15.00 (out of print)

Voices on the Verandah: Anglo Indian Prose and Poetry - Deefholts and Staub, eds. (2004) ISBN 0-9754639-O-X (pp238) Price \$10.00

The Way We Were: Anglo-Indian chronicles - Deefholts and Deefholts, eds. (2006) ISBN 0-9754639-3-4 (pp240) Price \$15.00 (out of print)

The Way We Are: An Anglo-Indian Mosaic - Lumb and Veldhuizen, eds. (2008) ISBN 0-9754639-4-9 (pp279) Price \$10.00

Women of Anglo-India: Tales and Memoirs – Deefholts and Deefholts, eds. (2010) ISBN 798-0-9754639-5-6 (pp233) Price \$10.00

More Voices on the Verandah: An Anglo-Indian Anthology – Lionel Lumb, ed. (2012) ISBN 97809754639-6-3 (pp 240) Price \$10.00

Curtain Call: Anglo-Indian reflections – Kathleen Cassity and Rochelle Almeida, eds. (2016) ISBN 97809754639-7-0 (232 pages) Price \$10.00

Unwanted - Esther Mary Lyons (1996) ISBN 0-9754639-9-3 (pp 488) Price \$10.00 (Self published)

Publisher: Blair Williams, PO Box 6345, Monroe Twp, NJ, 08831, USA. E-mail: blairrw@att.net

Shipping and Handling: Add \$3.50 for S&H for USA destinations. For outside the USA add \$10.00 The gross proceeds of all sales goes to CTR a USA 'Not for Profit' established to help the less fortunate in India. As postage from the USA to other countries is very costly, you are encouraged to arrange delivery through friends visiting the USA.

Purchase Options: Purchase directly from Blair Williams at above address or email (preferred). Make cheques payable to CTR). Or you may purchase through the website, <http://www.blairrw.org/ctr> using PayPal or credit card. Books are also available for purchase on Amazon.com

OTTER: Finally, Blair Williams, is there anything you would like to add about your publishing experience?

WILLIAMS: It was a challenging and fulfilling experience. I believe the publication of this series will make a difference in how the community is perceived by posterity. All the books are in the USA Library of Congress, each with a library control number and they are also part of the *Derozio Anglo-Indian Research Collection Centre* at the Calcutta University Library in Kolkata. Present and future researchers will find in them a source of information, and they have already begun to use these resources.

Rudy Otter, aged 81, is a retired Anglo-Indian journalist, columnist and short story writer who has contributed several articles and short stories to IJAIS and its sister publication, *The Anglo-Indian Wallah*. His acclaimed paperback, sub-titled "Anglo-Indian Funny Stories" comprises a selection of his personal-experience articles and short fiction. Entitled *The Very Best of Rudy Otter* the hilarious paperback is produced by *AngloInk.com*, and you can buy copies now from *AngloInk's* editor, *Harry MacLure*, at harrymaclure@yahoo.com.