The Whittle Story
A Live Book

Creating a Live Book

By Ruth Whittle, November 2019

I would like to talk to you today about creating a Live Book.

At the Probus meeting in April 2015, I spoke to you as "The Face behind the Badge". Much of that talk included the story of how, in 1984, Jeff and I set up a company called Whittle Programming to develop some computer software for the mining industry.

The company grew as the software was successfully used world-wide and last year, as you know, Jeff was awarded the Order of Australia for his work. He received his medal at Government House in April 2018, and a week later we held a dinner at the RACV Club. It was attended by 50 people, all of whom had been associated with the business over the years.

There were four after-dinner speeches, all given by members of the Whittle family who were, or still are, involved with the software. My speech that evening was very similar to the talk I gave to Probus three years earlier. At each occasion, many people said how much they enjoyed hearing about the early days. This led me to reflect on a long-held commitment to myself, and to others, to write a history of the Whittle software. Now this public recognition of Jeff's work highlighted the need to tell how it all came about.

I realised I could only write about my own personal experiences, which do not include any technical aspects. It is, in fact, a story with a multitude of facets, way beyond the capacity of a single person to relate.

The solution then became obvious and I came up with the concept of a "Live Book". Since I was not aware of the existence of any such thing, I made a list of its attributes.

It is a different way of producing a book, at no cost and freely available to everybody. Consisting of stories written by people relating their own experience with the Whittle software, it is an evolving entity that grows in an organic way. It is, in fact, a book that writes itself.

I use the term "book" loosely, because it only exists on the internet. This releases us from the work and expense of publishing a book in hard copy which, once printed, is often out of date until the next edition. A story can be revised or edited at any time at the request of the author, and readers can access the book and make copies of items that interest them. In line with recent thinking, no trees are harmed in this process.

The project is not about individual self-promotion, not a Jeff fan club. Nor is it a conference requiring technical or theoretical papers – those are already available.

There are no rules about the length of a story, and guidelines are generally liberating. Written in "lay speak", it is easily understood by non-technical people, and we can "hear" the author's own voice in the style of writing. Old photographs are of great value. Some voice-overs may be added later.

This is a historical account, detailing the development of the Whittle software and its application, giving a human face to the mining industry doing things in the best possible way.

Since most of the people working in the 1980s and 1990s are still living, it can also be regarded as different way of recording contemporary history.

In the year following Jeff's award, I approached people we had known in the past to gather material. The project was greeted with enthusiasm as I contacted some key figures.
When we had gathered eleven stories, including the four Whittle speeches from the RACV dinner, we decided it was time to start publishing.

I say "we" because I was able to discuss my ideas with Narelle Crothers and Stephanie Jones at Whittle Consulting. From the start, I saw the book as having a multi-dimensional tree structure and these talented women devised a brilliant means of capturing this in the final presentation. At this stage, Jeff saw the book for the first time and was highly impressed. The authors loved it.
The Live Book was officially launched two months ago (on 3rd September 2019), coinciding with the 20th anniversary of Whittle Consulting, which is now run by our son Gerald.

The Whittle Story
A Live Book

I intend to round up more stories about the early days, whilst the history of the consulting branch is still in the making.

To read Ruth's bio please scroll down…

Ruth Whittle BA

Ruth has an honours degree in French from the University of London.

Her first job was as Executive Officer in the Ministry of Supply in London, then in administration at AERE, Harwell (Atomic Energy Research Establishment).

After marrying Jeff in 1954, she devoted herself full-time to raising their six children, five sons and a daughter.

The family moved from England to Melbourne, Australia, in 1961.

When Jeff and Ruth established Whittle Programming in 1984, she successfully undertook the marketing of the software.

Since her retirement in 2000, Ruth has maintained a keen interest in the continuing development of the Whittle software.

She is currently working on compiling a history of the Whittle software by means of a Live Book.

The Whittle Story
A Live Book