

New beginnings: Cindy Davies

Beginnings always start with endings ... sounds like ancient philosophy, but I just made it up.

When I was retrenched from my teaching job, I trained as a tour guide at Crows Nest TAFE, Sydney.

During the course, we learned how to present a commentary from a moving vehicle - the TAFE mini-bus. We travelled from Crows Nest to Bondi and every 10 minutes a different student took up the commentary, sometimes in the past tense, 'We've just passed Sydney Opera House,' and 'Oops, sorry, that was Darling Harbour.' We all dreaded being stuck in traffic on Market Street, with nothing to talk about but David Jones and Pitt Street Mall

I graduated with Certificate Four in Tour Guiding and Management and was ready to launch myself on the inbound tour market. I took a casual job with a company which dealt with cruise ship passengers.

At the back of the Four Seasons Hotel there was always an unholy scrum. Jet-lagged tourists were disgorged from airport coaches, then had to hang around the hotel lobby from early morning as they waited to board their ship. To pass the time tour operators organised a city sites tour, which involved another scrum to get the best seat on the bus.

I have to admit I lost a few tourists: an American couple at the Opera House, a 'wanderer' in the Blue Mountains and two ladies who inadvertently joined a group of German tourists at Circular Quay. Happily, I found them all.

After the coaches, I started a walking tours business similar to the Rocks Walking Tours. My clients were mostly primary school children, whose comments were priceless. When I told them that children as young as nine were on the convict ships, one child muttered, 'I wish they'd transport my sister.' Asked what the windmills were used for on Observatory Hill, a little boy volunteered, 'To keep the convicts cool in the summer.'

Japanese student groups were terrified by the rubber rat I pulled out of my bag to demonstrate the rat plague of 1900, and some of the primary school children from the outer suburbs said they'd seen the Opera House on Channel Ten, but thought it was a model.

I sold the business after five years and still miss the eight guides who worked with me. Another ending - and another new beginning - as a writer.