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IWOC'S OCTOBER MEETING

Blogs open new opportunities for freelancers

BY JAMES J. HODL

Blogs (computer speak for web logs) are currently sprouting up faster than edelweiss in the Austrian Alps. What started only a few years ago as an online diary where individuals could share their adventures and thoughts with everyone else on the Internet has blossomed into many different forms, from disseminating political opinions to promoting products to functioning as online news magazines. And in the process, blogs provide new outlets for freelance writers.

A full explanation of this phenomenon and the opportunities opening for writing professionals will be provided by "Writing for Blogs," the presentation scheduled for the IWOC meeting on Tuesday, October 11. Brent Brotine, head of Evanston-based Brent Brotine Communications and author of a column on the corporate use of blogs that appears in the Association of Direct Marketing newsletter, will head the discussion. And while not firm at this writing, we hope to have experts on blog legal issues and the setting up of blogs on the Internet join Brotine for a panel discussion.

For his part of the presentation, Brotine will provide some of the same information on blogs contained in the public relations course he created for the University of Phoenix. Some questions that will be answered include:

- What does it take to establish and maintain a blog?
- What are the pitfalls of blogging?
- How does a blog increase business and exposure on Google?

Other issues to be discussed include the impact of blogging on the written word. As one can see on locally produced news blogs like www.autoblog.com, www.tvsquad.com and www.chicagoist.com, the emphasis is on crisp writing that tells the story in as few words as possible, with more detailed articles on the subject available through links.

"Writing for Blogs" will be the centerpiece of the IWOC meeting on Tuesday, October 11 at our new meeting location at the Chicago Athletic Club's 7th Floor Lakeshore Room, 12 S. Michigan Ave. Come at 5 p.m. to network with other professional freelance writers over cookies and coffee. The main program begins at 6 p.m. Admission is free to IWOC professional members; \$5 to associate members, and \$15 to nonmembers.

Following the meeting, attendees are invited to surf on down to a nearby restaurant for a buy-your-own dinner to further discuss the intricacies of blogs or to continue networking. 



"Writing for Blogs"
Brent Brotine
Tuesday
October 11
Chicago Athletic
Association
12 S. Michigan Ave.
Networking 5:00 PM
Program 6:00 PM

Professional members free
Associate members \$5
Nonmembers \$15

IWOC meets for programs
and networking the second
Tuesday of every month.

iwoc

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Changing your perspective on Chicago

BY HARRY J. KARABEL

The downtown Chicago of my youth was a different place, and I knew it well. We lived near 52nd and Kedzie on the southwest side. My mother worked downtown in the back office of a clothing store for Big and Tall men. Two or three times a week we made the half-hour drive downtown to pick her up after work. Sometimes I'd take the bus downtown and meet her for lunch: Kedzie to Archer and Archer to Randolph, fifty cents with a transfer. Then I'd walk two blocks to the store on Clark Street.



Then, State Street was the Great Street, with its upscale stores and the whiff of a life above and beyond that found in a south side bungalow. Christmas always brought us to Marshall Field's, the State Street fairy-tale windows, lunch in the Walnut Room under the giant tree and the most opulent, dream-inducing Toy Department in the city.

But east or west of State, downtown had little to offer: a few restaurants and movie theaters, but not much shopping and even less glamour. The clothing store was situated on Clark because the rents were cheaper and the parking was easier for customers (which included many of the Chicago Bulls and Bears) who could not find other stores that catered to their above-and-beyond clothing needs.

Michigan Avenue, too, was different. At the time, the tallest building in the city was the Prudential Building. The "Top of the Rock" restaurant on the building's 38th floor was a coveted after-prom dinner destination. The city stretched out before you in twinkling splendor and in every direction. You could see Meigs Field, the original Water Tower that withstood the Great Fire, and the pale ghost of the suburbs.

The "Magnificent Mile" as a marketing tool did not yet exist. Neither did Water Tower Place, the Hancock Building, the Sears Tower, or indoor shopping malls. For the most part, Michigan Avenue was all about business, unless you were going to the Art Institute, the Top of the Rock, or a symphony at the Petrillo band shell.

But I have to tell you, this is my home-town, and I love what they've done with the place.

Thanks to culture and commerce, State Street may no longer be the shining jewel it was in my childhood mind's eye. (Few things withstand that kind of test of time.) But the glory of "downtown" now stretches south and west into what used to be a drab industrial wasteland of warehouses, factories and junkyards (at least the way I remember it.)

The Magnificent Mile was born north of the river on Michigan Avenue. Now it stretches south with retail, restaurants and one-of-a-kind attractions, not the least of which is Millennium Park. I took my first walk around the park the second Tuesday of September and found it to be lush and bizarre and uniquely Chicago: a blend of industry and art, the com-mon and uncom-mon, the upper crust and the working class. I cannot name other cities that would feature towering obelisks with photos of average people who purse their lips and blow water at you. To me that says, "we can build something groundbreaking and unusual and then save it from being ostentatious with our sense of humor." In Chicago, we believe in keeping it real.



(Continued on page 3)

Lofty view, inspiring story highlight meeting

BY JOEN KINNAN

It was a beautiful day in the neighborhood, as Mr. Rogers used to say. And IWOCers were agog at the view of Millennium Park from our new 7th floor meeting room at the Chicago Athletic Association. Most spent the “meet-and-greet” time rooted to a spot by the window, ogling the bean, the water-drenched video displays and the rest of the scene. Very cool.

In short, the CAA digs were a hit, and new board member Paula Shevick pointed out another serendipitous plus: Tuesday is free day at the nearby Art Institute, so culturally inclined IWOCers can get a twofer: a free ramble through the AIC, followed by an evening of entertainment and/or edification with writer colleagues and dinner to boot. Who could pass it up?

The evening’s speaker, Jennie Spallone, combined tips, a reading, and even a raffle for a lively, fast-paced intro into the world of the struggling novelist who *isn’t* discovered by Mr. Magic Agent or the editors at Big Bucks Books.

Spallone was at various times a journalist and teacher of children with special needs before she tried her hand at fiction with her first mystery novel *Deadly Choices*. She was unable to interest an agent in the manuscript, and she didn’t want to send it “over the transom” to a publisher where it would have been almost certain to wallow in the slush pile until it melted. So she started a one-woman campaign to get her work noticed by attending every writer’s conference, workshop, reading venue and the like that she could find. Finally, her hard work paid off when a small publisher she met at a workshop agreed to take the novel. There was

one problem, though. Her novel had 31 point-of-view characters—typical novels have just a couple—so Spallone had to do some fast pruning. In just a few weeks, she was down to three POV characters.

Because Spallone’s publisher didn’t really offer any marketing help, she put together another personal blitz to sell the book. She even buttonholed diners at her favorite restaurant to ask if they’d buy the novel. “You do what you gotta do,” she said. Her IWOC appearance and others like it are all part of her strategy to make herself and her novel better known.

To give us a flavor of *Deadly Choices*, Spallone read several short chapters and then held the much-awaited raffle. (No one knew what was being raffled but everyone filled out a ticket.) The prizes were delightful: first prize got to name a character in Spallone’s next novel; second got to develop the physical description of a character; and third had the chance to decide the occupation of a character. The winners—all first timers at an IWOC meeting—seemed thrilled.

Ultimately, Spallone’s patience and hustle led to the big score she’d been looking for: an agent who wanted to represent her. Her agent is now shopping her second novel, and she’s already working on the third.

Most IWOCers probably aren’t planning to become novelists, but there’s a lesson in this for all writers, regardless of the type of work they do. It goes something like this: If you want to try some other type of writing—or if you’re a newcomer, *any* type of writing—go for it! Never mind that you’ve got the equivalent of a jillion POV characters. It’s not a crime; you’ll learn. But be prepared to work like a beaver, pick other people’s brains (Spallone sought out mentors like local novelist Barbara D’Amato), do your homework (Spallone spent hours and hours on research) and maybe step out of your comfort zone if necessary.

Spallone didn’t know anyone important who could open doors for her and didn’t get any fantastic breaks. She’s making her goal a reality through her own hard work, and to paraphrase a current commercial, if she can do it, you can too. 

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

(Continued from p. 2)

There is a terrific view of Millennium Park from the windows of the Lakeshore Room in the Chicago Athletic Association, the fine new home of IWOC’s monthly meeting. (You knew, in your heart of hearts, that I would eventually make a point.) In my mind, in my town, IWOC deserves a “room with a view,” and you owe it to yourself to come out and see it. Come a little early and take a walk around the park if you haven’t done that. Tuesday is still “free day” at the Art

Institute, so you could even make an afternoon of it (unless you’re currently getting all the inspiration you can stand).

The best writer’s organization in town now has one of the best views in town, and we need your best to help us continue to “keep it real” for all our members. If you haven’t asked yourself “What have I done for IWOC lately?” you should. Join us on the seventh floor at 12 S. Michigan on October 11. Like any change in perspective, it will do you good. 

From improbable beginnings to silver anniversary: IWOC turns 25

BY MARY MADIGAN

Who would have thought that a group of independent writers (aka “freelancers,” entrepreneurs, “free agents”) would form an organization with a charter, by-laws and the vitality to be going strong after 25 years? In 1979, the answer to that question would have been “Nobody, especially not IWOC co-founders Beth Bradfish and Catherine Rategan.”

At that time, Beth and Catherine, who had recently launched careers as independent writers, were concerned about getting health insurance to replace the employee benefits they had as writers in the corporate world. “We found a Blue Cross agent who said we could get group rates for the two of us, but we could get better rates if we had a group of about 30 people,” Catherine remembered. Motivated by the prospect of affordable insurance rates, Catherine and Beth planned a meeting for independent writers interested in group health insurance. They publicized the meeting with an ad in *The Reader* and many, many phone calls. “I made about 120 phone calls,” recalled Catherine. “I started with people I knew and asked each person for names of others who might be interested.”

More than insurance, writers needed community of colleagues

The night of the meeting, about 25 to 30 independent writers assembled in the party room of the building where Beth lived. They listened to the insurance agent’s presentation, but they also met each other and talked about the rewards and frustrations of an independent career. By the end of the meeting, there was a general consensus that the group should get together again. “Beyond the immediate need for insurance, the group recognized a need for a community,” observed Beth. “Everyone saw how nice it was to have a network of colleagues to turn to for advice, support and information.”

After that first meeting, there was a second meeting, then more meetings and the selection of a name through a collaborative, brainstorming process. IWOC evolved “very organically,” as Beth put it, with a small, core group of people contributing their time, talent and energy. Within months, they had written by-laws, received a charter, established a monthly meeting schedule and elected Jim Ardito as the first president.

Energy, ambitions, goals characterize IWOC

“From the start,” remembered Jim, “IWOC had great energy, ambitions and goals, with people looking forward to the day when the group would have a job line and a regular publication.”

In the years that followed, IWOC realized those early goals and added other programs, tools and resources that enhanced the organization’s value to members.

Esther Manewith recalled that during her term as president, 1997-99, IWOC started “neighborhood group meetings, where writers who lived in proximity could get together and share war stories.” Two of these groups, IWORP (Independent Writers of Rogers

Park) and IWOOP, (Independent Writers of Oak Park) still meet monthly for breakfast or lunch and lots of lively conversation.

The 1990s also saw the launch of the IWOC Web site, which was updated in 2004 with features to make it an excellent marketing and communication tool. Today, the IWOC board of directors continues to set goals for new programs to increase the organization’s visibility and market the skills of members to a wider audience of businesses and publishers.

We salute IWOC and the members, past and present, who have contributed their time and energy to create and sustain this community of colleagues. Happy 25th anniversary, IWOC! ✍️



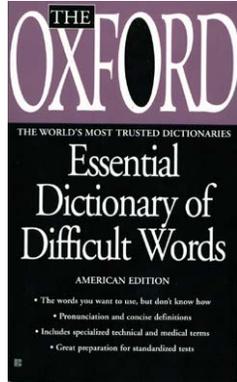
IWOC co-founders and past presidents at the August anniversary celebration: (left to right, front) Catherine Rategan, Harry Karabel, Bob Elliott, Mary Ann Porucznik, Beth Bradfish; (middle) Esther Manewith, Maija Balagot, Joen Kinnan, Jennifer Oatfield, Sally Chapralis, Jim Ardito, Brent Brotine; (rear) Tom Germuska, Ed Zotti, Richard Greb, Jim Kepler, Collin Canright, Jim Leman

Believe it—There really are “difficult” words!

BY RICHARD L. EASTLINE

This is yet another review in an irregular series devoted to books and Internet sites popularly classified as reference source material

The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Difficult Words / 484 pp. incl. preface and appendix / Berkley Books Div. of Penguin-Putnam, 2001 / Paperback, \$7.99 list / ISBN 0-425-18070-0.



Obviously, this is a niche book, meant for sale only to that small percentage of writers who may admit to not having as rich a vocabulary as others. So, for those few, here's the key to unlock the deficiency. The justly famous editorial staff at the Oxford Dictionary in some secretive manner has collectively chosen around 9000 entries. It's a substantial total and probably exceeds the common-word vocabulary that suffices for most readers. Nonetheless, even as a created challenge, it's been met and overcome. The cover title includes an informative display line that announces this as the American Edition, yet another of the sly stabs by our British cousins to show that they can accommodate the “other” forms of English spelling and usage. No matter the politics, this is a worthy addition to your reference collection.

As to the issue of “difficult,” some clarification is in order. The selected words are, for the most part, neither esoteric nor academic. Most likely, any experienced writer will not sense unfamiliarity in their presence. So, why are they singled out? Mainly, because a good percentage of these entries consist of words that look like other words or seem to originate from the same stem—and, hence, have related meanings. Perhaps at one time they did, but not necessarily in contemporary lexicography. Shadings may be subtle, but not knowing the variations creates the “difficult” aspect.

Looking for categories? Would make sense, but this volume follows a strictly alphabetical sequence, thereby adhering to its classification as a dictionary. One feature, though, that makes this small-type compendium valuable is the generous offering of usage inserts, akin to sidebars in that they occur next to words that are among the worst offenders in misleading. An example: *incredible* and *incredulous*. But, even without pairings, there are plenty of entries whose true definitions will raise eyebrows.

Logic prevails in the manner in which words are presented. Although there is no entomology given, there is a pronunciation guide, parts of speech labeling and cross references to other words. Where there are variations in meaning, each is set off with a visual marker. Closing the volume is an appendix of 10 pages listing prefixes and suffixes; each is presented with its meaning as well as an example.

All in all, for a very modest price, this specialized Oxford dictionary can take its place as a compact and convenient trouble-shooter for those occasions when you're not quite sure about a particular word you've chosen. There is a caveat, though. Begin reading the entries on any one page and you are likely to want to continue the exploration. Which all goes to prove that not every good book needs a plot. 

Calendar

October 11 (2nd Tuesday)

IWOC monthly meeting: “Writing for Blogs” with Brent Brotine. Discussion of how blogs are opening new opportunities for writers. At the Chicago Athletic association, 12 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Networking at 5 PM; program at 6 PM. Professional members free, associates \$5, nonmembers \$15.

The monthly food and networking get-togethers listed below meet at the same time and place each month unless otherwise noted. The groups welcome nonmembers.

October 6 (1st Thursday)

IWORP monthly breakfast: Join the Rogers Park IWOC contingent for breakfast at 9 AM at the A&T Grill, 7036 N. Clark St., Chicago. For more information, call Esther Manewith at 773/274-6215.

October 27 (4th Thursday)

IWOOP monthly lunch: The West Suburban group meets at noon at Poor Phil's at 139 So. Marion, Oak Park. Contact Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065 for more information.

Check out
IWOC's Web site at
www.iwoc.org

Employer lauds IWOC

IWOC is on at least one employer's list as the first place to call when in need of a writer. You may remember the Writers' Line's recent call for someone with experience in writing “citizenship reports.” Though the employer, Michael Matteoni, didn't find the IWOC writer perfect for the job until it was too late and thus didn't hire anyone for this particular gig, he told the Webmaster: “I was very pleased with the experience anyway. I got about 20 solid resumes from really good writers. I'll definitely come to IWOC for my writing needs in the future.” Writers' Line is picking up steam. Check with it often.