

Stet

JANUARY 2007
VOLUME 26 NUMBER 1

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

JANUARY MEETING

Veteran Political Writer to Give IWOCers the Lowdown on Illinois Politics

BY JAMES J. HODL AND LAURA STIGLER

GET THE INSIDE STORY ON DAN ROSTENKOWSKI'S FALL FROM GRACE, GEORGE RYAN'S PECCADILLOS, AND MORE, PLUS GET TIPS ON HOW TO GET A REALLY GOOD STORY

And in Illinois, politics can get pretty low down. If anyone has observed it, gained perspective on it, and chronicled it from the inside out, it's political journalist, editor and author, James L. Merriner. On Tuesday, January 9th, he'll be coming to IWOC and telling all about his over 25 years in covering Illinois politics and its bedfellow, public corruption, in his presentation "On the Political Beat."

Political reporting is fascinating, according to Merriner, but requires special skills to perform. Having served as political editor and columnist for the *Chicago Sun Times* and *Atlanta Constitution*, he has certainly honed those skills well. Techniques for getting scoops and obtaining information (how do you get a reluctant witness to scandal

to spill the beans?) will be on Merriner's agenda. He'll even cite many juicy examples. Merriner will also dis-



cuss a number of books he's authored on Illinois politics, including the one in progress, *The Man Who Emptied Death Row: George Ryan and the Politics of Crime*. Expect rare insights on the now-infamous Governor, as well as on the art of researching and writing this book.

IWOCers and guests who hanker to do political writing

— or just learn some sure-fire interviewing techniques — will get some valuable tips from a real pro who knows how to get what he needs from his subjects. Plus, who doesn't want to get the inside info — read "dish the dirt" — on the guys and gals who run this state. It promises to be a very entertaining program. You won't want to miss it.

The IWOC meeting will take place on Tuesday, January 9th at the Chicago Athletic Club's 7th Floor Lakeshore Room, 12 S. Michigan Ave. Networking begins at 5 p.m. The main program is at 6 p.m. Admission is free to IWOC members and \$15 to non-members. Following the meeting, attendees are invited to go to a nearby restaurant for a buy-your-own dinner to further discuss Roundtable topics or to continue networking. ♦♦

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Stet is published 11 times per year by the **Independent Writers of Chicago**, PMB 119, 1800 Nations Drive, Suite 117, Gurnee, IL 60031, 847/855-6670. Internet address: www.iwoc.org. Copy submissions and advertising materials are due by the 15th of the month preceding publication. All submissions and ideas will be considered. The subscription rate of \$1 per year is included in the annual membership dues. Copyright ©2006 by Independent Writers of Chicago.

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GUEST COLUMN MAIJA ROTHENBERG

I'll Do It in a Minute!

What should you do when it's two hours before deadline and you haven't even started writing? A step-by-step guide:

As the clock ticks, savor the feeling of self-importance. Your ho-hum little life finally has some drama.

Decide you must answer immediately the letter you received four and a half months ago from your third cousin in Prague.

Groom the cat with a boar's-bristle brush.

Recaulk the bathtub.

Remember, to be done properly, the job requires single-edged razor blades, a magnifying glass, and Q-Tips.

On your computer, create a form for your weekly grocery list. Agonize about which should be listed first: Dairy or Produce?

Answer all phone calls, even wrong numbers. Inquire about the caller's health and chat at length about the weather. If the caller gets boring or is the slightest bit unpleasant, say quickly, "Sorry. Gotta go. Under deadline."

Make a cup of tea.

Feel a wave of pity for the finches lingering by the empty bird feeder. Dash to the grocery store for birdseed.

Lift the lid on that fifty-pound file box labeled "To Be Sorted" to look for that *Writer's Digest* clip from 1996 called "How to Get Started."

Holler at your daughter for playing her stereo so loud. "Can't you see I'm writing!"

Make another cup of tea. Clean out the refrigerator

and freezer. Double-check the expiration dates on all frozen burritos.

Make mental notes for an article you'll write someday on good habits for writers. Speculate on what words the editor will use to praise it. "Pithy"? "Brilliant"?

Leap from your chair in mid-thought to pick dead leaves off your Christmas cactus. Since you're up anyway, haul out the vacuum cleaner and attack the cobwebs on the office windows.

Groom the cat again.

As your deadline looms nearer, and your terror peaks, notice your pulse and respiration rates increasing steadily. These are the aerobic effects of a freelance writing career.

Remember your just-made New Year's resolution to keep up with your bookkeeping. Start up your accounting software and key in petty cash receipts. Decide that what you really need before you get started is a snack. Make an apple pie from scratch.

As you roll out the crust, imagine the cover of the cookbook you'll write someday. Decide what you'll wear to the photo shoot.

Become alarmed at how pot-bound the spider plant has suddenly become. Run down to the basement for a bigger pot. While you're there, throw in a load of laundry. Or three.

Type up the recipe for tabbouleh that you promised to give your neighbor after last summer's block party. Play with the fonts and spacing until it looks perfect on the page. Print.



Change fonts. Print again. Download tomato clip art from the Web. Realize that the red in the tomato isn't quite right. Adjust color in Photoshop. Insert into recipe.

Wake up sleeping cat to play with it.

Fill out your Publisher's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes entry form. Carefully compare all the subscription rates on the magazine stamps with those you're currently paying. Write moving, evocative letter of complaint about the unfairness of it all to the subscription manager of *Harper's*.

Recall that neatness is next to godliness. Clean your office from top to bottom, except the inside of your laser printer, which you can't easily reach. Rush out to Office Max to get a can of ozone-safe office duster.

Google your editor. Pore over the commencement speech she delivered at her alma mater to try to discern her feelings about punctuality.

Panic. Realize the assignment is just too hard — there's absolutely no way you can do it. Best to put off trying.

Make another cup of tea. Reassure yourself that the assignment, in fact, is a piece of cake. You can probably do it in less than a half hour. Thus it's safe to put it off.

Tell your son to shut down that video game and start his homework. Lecture him on effective time management. Warn him that he'll never get ahead in life unless he learns to buckle down.

Do the dishes. With your hands in the hot sudsy

Continued on page 4.

Common-Sense Guides at Small-Cents Pricing

THIS IS YET ANOTHER REVIEW IN AN IRREGULAR SERIES DEVOTED TO BOOKS AND INTERNET SITES THAT ARE POPULARLY CLASSIFIED AS REFERENCE SOURCE MATERIAL.

100 Words...Almost Everyone Confuses & Misuses / From the Editors of the American Heritage Dictionary, 120 pp. (small paperback) / Houghton-Mifflin / \$4.95 list / ISBN 10: 0-618-55416-8

BY RICHARD EASTLINE

Directed mainly to students and recent graduates, the "100 Words" series began a few years ago and now comprises a half-dozen slender volumes. Glancing at the titles, one is very much apt to deem them "elementary" and move on to browse the more stimulating Peanuts compilations. That's not far from the mark, what with titles such as *100 Words Every High School Graduate Should Know* staring at you. But, as with many seemingly unimpressive neighborhoods, there are worthy structures to be found, as is the case with the volume under consideration.

All of the titles share a similar format: one entry to a page, identified by its classification as a noun, etc. and given a dictionary-style definition that's followed by considerable exposition on usage. It's this last attribute that bestows value to the project. The explanations are lucid without any "scholarly" tone, often presenting some characteristic that thereby enhances the understanding. Even the experienced writer is likely to discover helpful guidance in these brief essays.

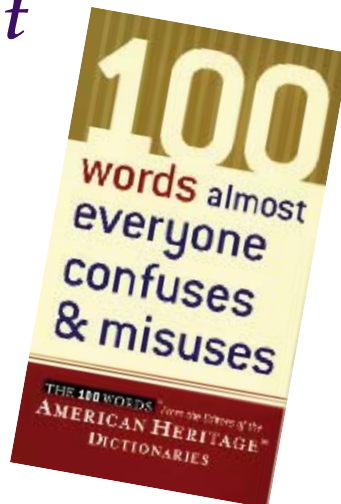
While there are other guides that tackle the issue of similar-but-different

words (Jeff Rovin's *What's the Difference* is a winner), this 2004 paperback falls short of high praise only because of its relatively short inventory. What is included represents admirable choices; there just aren't enough of them. But, in this era of downsizing, perhaps a "1000 Words" series wouldn't have the pizzazz to sell.

Skimming the contents, you'll find such familiar fare as "comprise" and "compose" along with "mass" and "weight" as well as "blatant" and "flagrant." There are lots more, nearly as common and similarly booby-trapped. Chances are that, as with chocolates and chips, you'll find it difficult not to go beyond the first one you try.

Among the other volumes in the series, two others could justify your attention. *100 Words Every Word Lover Should Know* may be burdened with a lame title, but the choices are not as prosaic as you might assume. On the other hand, *100 Words to Make You Sound Smart* is exactly what you would suppose—an undisguised tool for vocabulary one-upmanship and ideal for cocktail reception chit-chat.

All in all, the editors of the *American Heritage*



Dictionary may very well be having a grand old time playing around with this "100 Words" series. And if their announced audience choice doesn't embrace all of the offerings, they should be smart enough to deduce that professional wordsmiths surreptitiously will want to acquire some of them (in plain brown wrappers, of course). ♦♦

How Sickening Is That?

BY JOEN KINNAN

Apropos of the column above, one of your editor's pet peeves is the all-too-common misuse of the word "nauseous." Something that is nauseous makes people ill, e.g., "The gas fumes were nauseous." The proper word to describe one's own feelings of illness is *nauseated*. So, when I hear someone say, "I was really nauseous at the party last night," I picture hordes of people fleeing from that sickening individual. If one isn't fond of the the speaker, though, one can relish the mistake: It's quite satisfying to mutter under your breath, "I just bet you were." ♦♦

Holiday Party Reprise: You Shudda Been There!

BY JOEN KINNAN

The IWOC holiday party at Cafe Iberico was a huge success. We had a wonderful room to ourselves, and everyone seemed to be feeling particularly festive. We gorged ourselves on platter after platter of scrumptious tapas. The garlic potatoes were an especial hit, and who says people don't like octopus? We washed it all down with a few glasses of free wine and even had a toast or too.

Then came Santa, aka, Mary Ann Porucznik, who was a very chic Santa indeed in a red brocade jacket. She had Santa's hat, though, so we knew the treats were coming. Gifts ranged from always useful office supplies to sweets and other munchable goodies. Thanks to Karen Schwartz for buying — and wrapping — all those presents.

Another highlight of the evening was a conversation with Robert Shoemaker, who was our Santa for so many years — and absolutely looked the part. Robert now lives in Oregon, and he was thrilled to talk with the "gang," as he called us. Jane Ranshaw, who lent the cell phone for the call, got a pretty anxious look after about ten people had passed the phone around.

Many thanks to party planners extraordinaire Roger Rueff and Jim Leman for making it such a lovely evening. ♦♦

Handling the Ultimate PR Crisis

When the rest of the world stood in disbelief in the wake of the devastation of the 9/11 attacks, many with crisis communications responsibilities were faced with unprecedented challenges never before imagined.

- Were the plans they had in place enough to handle the crisis?
- What worked and what didn't?
- How did they step back from the emotionally charged event to take charge of media, public relations, and crisis communications strategies that they may never have anticipated using?

Join PCC members and guests for lunch and to hear strategic advice from PR professionals who worked for corporations, nonprofits, and airlines during 9/11. Panelists are Rahsaan Johnson (formerly spokesperson for United Airlines) and Al Orendorff, both directors of public relations at Aon Corporation, Philip Zepeda, vice president of communications at America's Second Harvest, and Jim Binder, manager of public relations with the Options Clearing Corporation. Zepeda was a spokesperson for the American Red Cross during 9/11, and Binder is also with ChicagoFIRST, a non-profit association of financial institutions dedicated to homeland securing and emergency management issues.

The luncheon is at the Amarone Banquet Room of Manggiano's Restaurant, 516 North Clark Street in Chicago, on Wednesday, January 10. Registration is from 11:30 a.m. until noon. The luncheon and presentation are from noon until 1:30 p.m. If you register before 5 p.m. the preceding Friday, the cost is \$30 for members, \$40 for nonmembers, and \$20 for students. Late registration costs are \$40 for members, \$50 for nonmembers, and \$30 for students. If you decide to walk in at the last minute, it will cost you \$45 if you're a member, \$55 if you're a nonmember, and \$35 if you're a student. ♦♦

I'll Do It in a Minute

Continued from page 2.

water, ponder why you ever decided to start freelancing in the first place. Review ten years of diary entries for the answer.

Five minutes before your deadline, groom the cat again. Dash to the hospital to get treatment for cat bite.

From a pay phone in the emergency room, preferably in a noisy area, call your editor. Explain that due to an unforeseen medical emergency, there will be a slight delay in submitting your copy.

Apologize profusely. Graciously accept her concern about your well-being. Tell her you'll turn in your manuscript as soon as you can — because you're a pro, and a pro never misses a deadline. ♦♦

Calendar

January 9

IWOC monthly meeting. "On the Political Beat," Political journalist, editor and author James L. Merriner, gives the low-down on low down Illinois politics, sharing successful "how-to" secrets of his own on political reporting. Tuesday, January 9th, Chicago Athletic Club's 7th Floor Lakeshore Room, 12 S. Michigan Ave. Program 6 p.m. Networking 5 p.m. Nonmembers, \$15; IWOC members free. For more information, call 847-855-6670 or visit www.iwoc.org.

February 13

IWOC monthly meeting. Save the date. Details to come.

The monthly food and networking get-togethers listed below meet at the same time and place each month unless otherwise noted, but call ahead in case of cancellation. The groups welcome nonmembers. If there's no group in your area, why not start one? Contact webmaster@iwoc.org.

January 25 (4th Thursday)

IWOOP monthly lunch. Join near-west suburbanites at noon for an outdoor lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park (summer location). For more info, call Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065.

February 1 (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 info, call Esther Manewith at 773/274-6215.

IWOC WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

ELIZABETH GRANT and KATIE VALENTINO

It's Happening on the Web!

Check Out Writers' Line

Browse Resources

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WWW.IWOC.ORG