

Stet

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

MAY MEETING

Watch a Mystery Unfold & Get Tips on Doing Research & Getting Published

BY JAMES J. HODL

Through much of the last century, the most consistently selling fiction books have been mystery novels, with authors from Dashiell Hammett to Raymond Chandler to Erle Stanley Gardner penning chart toppers. In more recent years, the best-selling nonfiction books have been biographies, with books on Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and currently Albert Einstein topping the *New York Times* Best Seller List.

Crossing these genres is Barbara Gregorich, a local writer with many books to her name, including a popular biography of early 20th Century mystery writer Earl Derr Biggers, whose greatest creation was the wily sleuth Charlie Chan. And she will cover all bases during a two-part presentation at the IWOC meeting on Tuesday, May 8.

The first part of Gregorich's popular presentation is based on her book, *Charlie Chan's Poppa: The Life of Earl Derr Biggers*. Complete with visuals, the presentation will cover how Biggers' 1919 vacation in

Hawaii resulted in combining his idea for a who-dunit involving a "perfect" murder with the creation a Chinese-American detective. A sympathetic and complex character, who went against the grain of the racist Asian stereotypes of the day like Fu Manchu, Charlie Chan helped create a new image for Asian Americans while providing much entertainment in a series of intriguingly puzzling novels and later Hollywood movies.

After the presentation, Gregorich will entertain questions related to her work from how to research a biography to how to get published. Among Gregorich's published books are the detective novel *Dirty Proof*, a sports history *Women at Play: The Story of Women in Baseball*, and the how-to book *Writing for the Educational Market*. Her most recent published book is in the children's market: *Wilbur Buys a Pig in a Poke*, for which a sequel is due in September.

A Chicago resident,



Gregorich also teaches workshops on writing adult fiction, adult nonfiction, and children's books. She is a member of the Authors Guild, Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, Mystery Writers of America, Sisters in Crime, and Private Eye Writers of America.

Gregorich's double-barreled presentation will be the centerpiece of the IWOC meeting to be held Tuesday, May 8 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 gourmet cookies and coffee. The main program, including a brief business meeting, begins at 6 p.m. Admission is free to all IWOC members and \$15 to nonmembers. This is our last meeting at CAA, so you won't want to miss it.

Attendees are invited after the meeting to continue discussing the presentation or simply network with other independent writers at a nearby restaurant over a buy-your-own dinner. ♦

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GUEST COLUMN / JOEN KINNAN

Solidarity Makes Us Strong

IT'S NOT JUST AN OLD-TIME WOBBLY SLOGAN; WE NEED EACH OTHER.

What sets members of IWOC apart from other writers? I like to think that one thing is our sense of professionalism. When I see things like, "I'm desperate; I'll work for anything," on the writers' listings on Craig's List or similar sites, I cringe. How unprofessional! How appalling! IWOCers don't do that. We're members of an honorable profession, just like doctors and lawyers (well, maybe not lawyers). We've worked hard to hone our craft, and we deserve commensurate pay.

IWOC has no power to negotiate rates for individuals, but the very fact that there is this type of professional organization helps set a standard. United, we can hold the line for decent pay because we all expect it, and prospective clients can see that our rates are similar. But without IWOC, we're just individual writers competing against Mr. or Ms. Desperation.

In this Internet Age, we're also competing against talented writers from other countries who can afford to work for less because their cost of living is lower. If you don't think this is going to put pressure on U.S. writers, consider that American high schoolers are already being tutored in English by people from India via the internet.

In my considered opinion, we all need the safety in numbers that IWOC represents for this reason if for no other.

But there are plenty of

"others." There may be people in IWOC who feel that the organization hasn't done a damn thing for them, but I'm willing to bet that, if such people exist, they haven't done anything for or with IWOC either.

I've chosen to stake my professional career on the belief that, if I work hard for IWOC, I'll get something back workwise as well as personally. And I have. In spades. I've gotten countless jobs through referrals from other members — one lasted more than 15 years and only ended with the death of the client — and a number through my listing on the website. One client found me the first year we were online and is still with me.

Jeff Steele told me recently that a new client has already

paid for his entire 17 years of IWOC membership! For most of us, one good job garnered through IWOC will take care of at least the current year's membership. And you can take the cost off your taxes.

IWOC isn't only about dollars and cents, of course. It's also about friendship, the ability to pick another member's brain when you're entering a new field, tips you get from the programs, and much more. But even if you're a hard-nosed, bottom-line kind of person, you have enough friends thank you very much, and you know everything there is to know, IWOC should still be your organization. Whatever else you are, you are not an island. Rejoin IWOC today and help us keep professionalism in our craft. ♦

FYI: Recycle Your Old Equipment

How many old computers, monitors, printers, and other bits of computer detritus are taking up precious space in your office? Everybody means to get rid of this junk, but it isn't easy.

Midwest Computer Recycling to the rescue. They'll take all such stuff. (Their website says they charge for taking old monitors, but apparently they don't actually.) The rub is Midwest Computer Recycling is in Lake Bluff, a long haul for many of us.

They will pick up, but the charge is fairly steep. For example, to pick up in Oak Park, the charge would be

around \$125, unless they had other pickups in the area. Going in on the deal with neighbors might make it manageable, though.

If you want to make the trip, the address is 101 W. Skokie Blvd., Lake Bluff. For more info, call 847-582-1730 or visit www.midwestcomputerrecycling.net. If your hardware is usable, it will be donated to schools or other good places.

Getting rid of outmoded equipment is a problem, so if you know of other places that will take it, contact *webmaster@iwoc.org*. It benefits us all to keep it out of our overused landfills. ♦

Author Targ Brill Tells All About Writing Books for Young People

BY PAULA SHEVICK

Have you ever wanted to write a fiction or nonfiction book that actually reaches the children's or adult's market? Our April speaker has done it and then some. *Barack Obama: Working to Make a Difference*, *Bronco Charlie and the Pony Express*, *Raising Smart Kids for Dummies/Keys to Parenting a Child with Autism*, *Tooth Tales from Around the World*, and *Diary of a Drummer Boy* are just 5 of the 65 books written by award-winning author Marlene Targ Brill.

At IWOC's April 10 meeting, this warm, friendly writer of mostly nonfiction and historical fiction books for children and adults spoke to IWOC members about what you need to succeed in her business.

The first step is to know and love your audience. An important ingredient in Brill's success is that she loves children. Her writing began when, as a teacher of children with disabilities, she wrote materials to help her children learn. Soon after, she was writing for all kinds of media: magazines, the internet, newspapers, videotapes, books, and textbooks. After many years of success, Brill still returns to school to visit children and teachers. She sincerely takes interest in such things as how children respond when a big bug is discovered in a classroom.

Besides loving children for themselves, Brill finds that the quality of her writing depends on listening to

children's speech. This is an important tool in finding just the right word. Books written for adults have many more words than children's books. The word count declines as the age of the reader declines. So if Brill writes a book with few words for a tiny tot, every word must count. "You must punch each word," she says. Her ear, honed by listening to children talk, tells her what words to keep and what to leave out.

Reading is also necessary in honing your ear. Before she writes a book, Brill reads many books at the level to which she's going to write to get the right feeling for language. She advises that, while reading good books for children, you should also study them for these qualities: an opening that grabs you; a strong beginning; command of language; universality of the story; an authentic narrative view—one that the writer sticks with throughout the story; natural dialogue; humor, energy, life, believability; the potential for illustration.

You can also consult a children's writer's word book which puts into categories the words that are best for certain ages.

How do you decide what to write about? You can go online to find writers' guidelines and an up-to-date publisher's wish list or consult an editor who knows your type of book. Or go to conferences and trade shows to find out which books interest publishers.

You can also check resources like Children's Writers and Illustrators' Market.

Another way to break into the children's market is to write a book that fills a gap in a series.

Keep in mind that editors don't want a laundry list of ideas. They want to see that you have a passion for one thing.

You could also ask what books are currently paying writers the most amount of money. These books are often written for older kids. They include fantasy, science fiction, historical fiction, the paranormal and supernatural, and true biography. Brill advises, "Don't write for trends, because the trend will be gone."

How does Brill go about researching books? She researched Barrack Obama by reading his autobiography and interviewing his law firm boss, friends from Harvard, and friends from Hawaii. She researched her books about medical conditions by going to medical associations and interviewing people who have a given disease.

How to choose a publisher? Keep in mind that the bigger the publisher, the quicker your book will be out of print. The smaller publishers will give more attention to your book.

To find an editor or agent, Brill recommends you go to the acknowledgment section of a book. Editors change a lot, she says, so if you find an editor who's kind to you and that editor moves, fol-



Marlene Targ Brill

low him or her.

Brill recommends sending multiple submissions, each of which includes an SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope). It's very helpful to send a checklist on a 3x5 card with questions for editors to check about how they react to your book. If an editor gives you a response with a signature—even if it's a rejection—don't throw it away. Follow through on it.

After you submit your manuscript, be prepared to discover that a book requires many revisions and is often rejected. It takes a long time to write, be accepted, and see yourself in print. If it's a strong manuscript, however, it will find a home.

Brill recommends that you negotiate your book on a sliding scale: after your book sells more than 10,000 copies, you should get a boost in rates. You can negotiate your contract yourself or have someone negotiate for you.

If you have a passion to write, ignore the naysayers. Brill speaks from experience. And when you finish your research, sit down and write the book. Too many writers do all the research and never write the book.

To learn more about Brill's writing, visit her website: www.marlenetargbrill.com.

IWOC Welcomes New Members

Ruth Thaler Carter
Martha Turner

Renew Your IWOC Membership Now!

JUST ONE WEEK LEFT TO GET THREE EXTRA FREE LISTINGS. RENEW BY MAY 16!

Time is getting short. To get three extra free listings, you need to renew by May 16. Go to the Members-Only page and renew online through PayPal. It's really fast and easy, and you can pay with a credit card if you want to. We aren't raising dues, still just \$150 for professional members; you get a generous five free listings plus three more if you work on a committee (after that, extra listings are \$10 apiece); and being listed online is now free. Where else can you get a year's worth of advertising to the whole online world of potential employers for that kind of money?

Such a bargain! But there's more: free admission to meetings, a couple of great parties, *Stet*, a wonderful resource page, the Writers' Line (we're going to eliminate the plethora of fulltime jobs listed, and we now have some A-1 resources for finding better-paying prospects), listing in the print directory (sent to you and all employers who request it), and perhaps best of all: the opportunity to network with colleagues.

Anyone who joined *after* January 1, 2007 does *not* have to renew. If you joined at any other time last year, you do have to renew, but you'll get a rebate for one, two, or three quarters depending on when you joined.

Those who really want to use the paper forms and send a check to the office can do so. The forms will be downloadable from the Members' Only page too, or you can request that the office send them to you.

Sign up now before you forget. Contact webmaster@iwoc.org if you have any questions. ♀

Calendar

May 8

IWOC monthly meeting. "Charlie Chan's Poppa and The Writing of Biographies and Mysteries." Versatile local writer Barbara Gregorich gives a two-part presentation that will help solve the many mysteries of writing for both these wildly popular genres. Tuesday, May 8th, 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.

June 12

IWOC monthly meeting (rescheduled February program). Word maven Erin McKean will introduce us to little known reference works and we'll have fun with some unusual words. Save the date.

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.

April 5 (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.

May 24 (4th Thursday)

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.

It's Happening on the Web!

Check Out Writers' Line

Browse Resources

See What's Doing in IWOC Events

WWW.IWOC.ORG