

Stet

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

AUGUST — iWOCFest

It's Time to Party at Pegasus!

BY JOEN KINNAN

Unless you're a Cubs fan, you're probably beset by the summer doldrums right about now. It's hot; raccoons have eaten your tomatoes; and you've had it with researching that article on whether cows are right- or left-handed. You need a break bigtime!

The winged horse to the rescue! On Tuesday, August 14, we IWOCers and friends will gather on the rooftop at Pegasus Restaurant in Greektown to watch the sun set over the city, sip some therapeutic libations, and then dive into all manner of Mediterranean delicacies served family style (the better to pig out on what you

like best). IWOC is even going to spring for the dinner wine that accompanies the feast.

A couple of hours of relaxation with good wine, great food, and sparkling conversation, and you'll be so mellowed out you'll consider taking the leftovers home for the raccoons.

The cost for this therapy is \$25 a head with advance reservations, \$30 at the door. A cash bar gets you the preprandial drink of your choice, and we party rain or shine — indoors or out.

So bring that significant other we haven't seen since last year, your friends and



neighbors, even your clients. If you're not a member, it's a great chance to meet IWOCers at their leisure.

Everyone's welcome.

The party starts at 5:30 and ends whenever. Pegasus Restaurant is located at 130 South Halsted. There's valet parking, street parking if your karma is good, and several nearby lots. If you haven't already signed up, click on the link in the calendar (page 5) and go to IWOC Events for a PayPal or flyer link to pay by check. We'd miss you if you weren't there, so sign up now. It's a great party. 🍷

Novel Sources for Health Insurance

BY JOEN KINNAN

Health insurance is a major expense for most freelance writers, but "go bare," and you risk living in a box under a bridge in the event of a catastrophic illness. So most any option, however oddball, may be worth looking into. IWOCer Elaine Fiedler alerted us to these possibilities from an article called "The Healthy Writer" by Linda Formichelli, which was published in the online *Writer's Digest*. You can

read the complete article at http://www.writersdigest.com/articles/formichelli_healthy_writer.asp. We can't vouch for any of these; we haven't checked them out, but they may work for someone.

Alumni Associations.

This is for the fairly recent college graduate. Some college alumni associations offer health insurance for up to five years after your graduation. According to Formichelli, there are dozens of colleges that do this

through something called GradMed. Contact gradmed.com to see if your alma mater is listed or contact your college, which may offer insurance through another alumni provider.

Your local Chamber of Commerce.

Some chambers offer group health insurance to local businesses. You *are* a business if you're working independently. If you don't know what your local chamber is, you can find it at

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/HARRY KARABEL

Ch-Ch-Ch-Changes — Turn and Face the Strange



I recently took a car ride with a couple of clients from Hyde Park to North Michigan Avenue. It was early afternoon and we knew the expressway and Lake Shore Drive would be jammed. So we wound through side streets and main arteries to get to our meeting, and in the process, saw a lot of Chicago we hadn't seen in a while.

For many years, the area south and west of the Loop was a no-man's land (are we now required to call it a no-person's land?) of warehouses and empty storefronts and squalor. Now I'm pretty sure I could not afford to live in that beautifully re-gentrified neighborhood. The three of us in the car grew up in the city, and we all agreed that we were thrilled to see our hometown blossom and grow as it has done. But of course, we all got nostalgic for pieces of the old city in which we were raised.

If you have ever been part of a similar conversation, you know that one of the first places it's going to go is Riverview: the legendary northwest-side amusement park that was so much a part of your childhood if you grew up in Chicago in the 50s and 60s. The 140 acres on Belmont and Western were home to fun and fantasy on a much grander scale than would ever appear as a carnival in a church parking lot on a hot summer weekend.

There was the Mad Mouse and the Bobs ("90 miles an hour into a pitch-dark tunnel!"), the Carousel with armored horses straight out of King Arthur, the bizarre

Midway attractions, and the two funhouses: Aladdin's Castle and the Devil's Den. I can vividly remember being scared in the best possible way as I was walking through the Devil's Den, thinking that the glaring orange and red color scheme and potential mishaps were really giving me a glimpse of that version of the afterlife. (Little did I know that some day I would be a freelance writer, a job which on occasion gives me a more disturbing glimpse of "Life in Hell.")

As I was preparing this column I looked at a few Riverview websites. I can still remember the impact the place had on me as a kid. But the high-gloss sheen associated with the Disneyization of our modern amusements made Riverview look a little tawdry by comparison. If it had managed to last beyond 1967, my guess is it would not have lasted long. And do we really want to be a part of the re-gentrification of Riverview? None for me, thanks. Ch-ch-ch-change is inevitable. And change can be good.

In his affected, adolescent stutter, David Bowie was trying to tell his fans that change was good. It's good to turn and face the strange, the new. Stasis is death, even if you're scared of death of moving on. Ralph Waldo Emerson put it a slightly different way. He said: "Always do what you're afraid to do."

Our ride and our reminiscences continued. We headed north up Canal Street and passed the new façade

of the White Palace, a classic Chicago breakfast and lunch diner. One of the first times I met this client in the city, we met at the White Palace. He asked me to meet him for breakfast there, and he did not hear me gasp.

My mother used to work downtown, and two or three nights a week we would make the half-hour drive to pick her up: north on Kedzie to Archer, north and east to Canal, north on Wacker until we got to Clark Street. Each time we made the trip, we passed the White Palace, this lone, sad sign of civilization on the outskirts of downtown, in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by nothing. Isolated. Desolate. You couldn't imagine eating there. What, I wondered, was this client thinking?

I wasn't thinking that the neighborhood might have changed in 40 years. I drove right by the White Palace the first time because I did not recognize the neighborhood. Then, when I realized where I was, I couldn't find a place to park. And then I walked into this clean, bright, well-scrubbed place and promptly ordered too much breakfast. (You'll be hard-pressed to find a better meal deal.) Now it's the only place we meet for breakfast. But I still haven't figured out how to order smaller portions.

My life is ch-ch-ch-changing. A month from now, I'll step down as IWOC president. This is not the official "last column ever farewell." (Do stay tuned until next month.) But that car ride

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Making Documentaries and Baking Bread: Rose Spinelli Illustrates the Joy of Filming a Documentary through the Joy of Cooking

BY DAVE EPSTEIN

Who'd have thought that a 30-minute film about baking bread could keep an audience enthralled?

That's what happened when documentary scriptwriter, Rose Spinelli, showed part of her film, *Baking Bread*, at the IWOC meeting on July 10. For generations, the women in Spinelli's family, originally from Sant' Ambrogio, a village on the north coast of Sicily, have baked bread every week. After Spinelli used part of the film to illustrate the craft of documentary filmmaking, the audience asked to see the whole film.

When Spinelli was starting out, she told people she wanted to do videos, and she started to get calls and gradually work started coming in. "It does help," she said, "to have friends and associates who are art directors and video instructors." Spinelli has also written scripts for a series titled *Workplace Essential Skills* for Kentucky Educational Television and has worked on numerous documentaries, infomercials, and films for corporate clients.

She says the documentary filmmaker must be obsessive and totally committed to the story. This can be painful because it's essential to be both objective and personal, and "you have to put your ego aside and put yourself on the line, so that you can be real and honest."

You have to be a visual thinker. Can you tell a

story through pictures and images? How good are you at writing dialogue? "The words (in a script) only matter to drive the story forward," says Spinelli.

Spinelli made *Baking Bread* out of her personal commitment to the subject of her family's ancestral Sicilian heritage. As the child of first-generation immigrants to the United States, she wanted to make a film about her parents' heritage and their experience of leaving their native home for a new land.

The motif of baking bread became central because her mother and her older sisters always made bread each week. As the first child born after her parents came to the United States, she was called "l'Americana" in the family. She had never made bread, and this became an emblem of a cultural disconnect she hoped to bridge with the film.

In *Baking Bread* she was director, scriptwriter, and producer — but she recruited an experienced film editor, videographer, and lighting technician.

Her first challenges were to raise money, recruit a crew, and then get her family, the crew, and all the equipment to Sicily. After the opening close-up of her mother's hands kneading dough, the film shows the arrival in Sant' Ambrogio, images of her Sicilian family greeting the American relatives, and scenes of cooking the welcome feast and the aunts, uncles, and cousins

celebrating the reunion.

Spinelli quickly learned the initial plan always changes. For one thing, it was always time to eat when they were supposed to be filming. So she worked the family meals into the film. Everyday life in Sant' Ambrogio comes alive with images of wine pressing, women hanging out laundry, children playing, and old men smoking and chatting on benches beside the narrow village lanes.

In key scenes her parents describe their early lives in Sant' Ambrogio, show Spinelli around the old family farm and the tiny cottage where they and her older sisters had lived before emigrating, and describe the sadness and anxiety of selling the land and leaving home with only \$300 in their pockets.

Spinelli began by writing a treatment rather than a script. This allowed flexibility, which gives the film its spontaneity and authenticity. She shot "25-ish" hours of video to make the 30-minute film. Spinelli explained that filmmakers shoot an A roll, which contains the critical action and dialogue scenes, such as her parents showing her the old family farm. They also shoot a B roll, which consists of more general images, like the shots of village life, which are used for transitions and links to keep the story moving and



to echo the main themes.

After returning to the U.S., she created a detailed log of every scene, including its exact timing on the tape. From this log, the video editor made a rough cut, and then Spinelli did a paper edit of the log, which was used for the final edit. It took only about ten minutes to write the narrative voice-over.

After the presentation, there was a lively discussion, with many questions and comments from the audience about the transition from TV documentaries to short Internet videos, and the need for writers to team up with videographers if they wanted to enter this market.

IWOC Welcomes
New Members

Clare Curley
Lori Parker
Jean Van Rensellar



Circa 426: St. Patrick drives the snakes out of Ireland.

August's Question of the Month

BY KAREN SCHWARTZ

What tips would you give beginning freelancers?

Pat Terry: Specialize.

Identify which areas of writing you love and/or excel at, e.g., journalism—features or hard news—or business writing or public relations writing.



Join affinity organizations online and in real life, such as IWOC, Association for Women Journalists, Publicity Club of Chicago, International Association of Business Writers, Society of Professional Journalists. And network your heart out!

Create a very targeted website of your own, with samples of your work and photos—clips are even better—along with testimonials, a short bio of you and your expertise/experience. Link it everywhere you can, such as IWOC, Media Bistro/Avantguild, Society for Professional Journalists.

Study and research your target markets such as top newspapers and magazines covering your areas of expertise or interest or top PR agencies in Chicago, for starters.

Make a list of your top 20, 50, or 100 prospects. Call each of them to get a contact name, direct phone number, and e-mail address. If you reach the right person—the feature editor, for example—introduce yourself and tell him/her quickly (think one-minute sound bite) about yourself, what you can write for them and that you will be sending a bio and clips.

Follow up within a week—before the person forgets your call and conversation. Send that bio with clips.

If you have no clips, create them. If you are interested in PR writing, volunteer to do a press release or kit for a small nonprofit. If it's business writing, interview the CEO at one of those nonprofits or company or store and send your story to a local newspaper. If it's journalism, contact the local newspaper first and suggest a story idea you would like to write for them—free, if need be.

Sally Chapralis: The first step, when you're starting out as a full-time freelance writer, is to clarify why



you're freelancing. Did you purposely choose freelancing because it fits in with your professional goals or personal lifestyle? Or, did it happen by default? Knowing the answer will help you make a plan and focus on your to-do list.

Next, remember that freelancing is your livelihood and a business. Yes, of course, you have to know how to write and live up to the promise of your personal promotion. But, now that you're in business for yourself, you must establish income goals; learn to develop and keep business (an all-consuming enterprise in itself); and learn how to collaborate with other complementary freelancers.

Finally, regularly re-evaluate your situation to see if freelancing is working for you. If it is, IWOC's resources can help you succeed... whether you're a beginner or an old pro.

George Becht: Don't worry about being "writerly," but do be concerned about writing right.



Most business and technical writing is best if it is clear and friendly. That leaves out the complex constructions: the big words and terms so little used that most people have to look them up. Certainly there are situations that call for a specific vocabulary and the use of words that have concise meanings. You'll know when you encounter such an assignment. But for most work, take clues from the client's samples and write text that you wouldn't mind having to read.

Clients expect a writer's writing to be right. After all, it's what we do, and we ought to do it without blunders. A few quality reference books are enough: a dictionary, thesaurus, grammar style guide(s). If in doubt, look it up. My favorite references are: 1) *Complete Wordfinder* by Oxford University and Readers Digest. It's an excellent American dictionary, with the Oxford thesaurus and some references to British usage thrown in. 2) *The Gregg Reference Manual*. It's a comprehensive grammar, style guide, and general reference book. 3) Style guides for many types of writing. For the medical field, get the AMA guide. My writing is general and I keep three at hand: the Associated Press, the University of Chicago, and the U.S. Government Printing Office guide. 🐣

President's Column

Continued from page 2.

inspired a new approach to a theme that I visited all too regularly on these pages.

Are you changing the way you are looking at your IWOC membership? When was the last time you got involved in a committee? When was the last time you made a change that would help you grow your business? Change delivers. Ask anybody in IWOC — or any other writer's organization — who made a decision to get more involved. Inevitably, business follows. Now, maybe you don't need any more business. Maybe you have all you can handle. Maybe you have so much you're thinking of shutting down your website and changing your phone number until you can catch up.

Or maybe not. The IWOC Presidency has been an astonishing boon to my business. Frankly, I would be out of business right now if it were not for the work that has come my way through IWOC. Making the decision to go to a longer meeting once a month, make a few phone calls and write a few e-mails in between, has been the most dramatic, cost-effective marketing I have ever done.

Come September, I get to be Parliamentarian. I'm not exactly sure what that means. But once a month I'll go to a longer meeting and make a few phone calls and write a few e-mails in between. And work will follow.

So I invite you, one last time, to make a change, to turn and face the strange. Get involved. Get reconnected. You'll find that it's really not that strange at all. As Tom Waits once sang in his shambling, Carney bel-low: "You cannot win if you do not play." 🐣

Health Insurance

Continued from page 1.

<http://chamberofcommerce.com>.

Home Depot. This one seems really off the wall, but apparently Home Depot provides a “Business ToolBox” that offers a number of services for small businesses, including health insurance. The WD article says that “customized solutions in individual and group coverage are available in all 50 states.” To apply or to get more info, call 866-333-3099 or go to the website: <http://hdbusinesstoolbox.com>.

Your state’s Farm Bureau. The American Farm Bureau is an independent volunteer organization that aids families of farmers and ranchers. Each state has a chapter, and supposedly some offer affordable health insurance to people whether or not they have anything to do with farms. To locate your state’s Farm Bureau, go to <http://fb.org>.

Other professional organizations. If you belong to other professional organizations besides IWOC, check them out to see if they offer health insurance. Some other writers’ and artists’ groups do.

Freelancer’s Union offers insurance only in New York at the present time, but the group hopes to expand nationwide, and Chicago may be their next target:

<http://freelancersunion.org>.

Also offering healthcare coverage in New York is **The Editorial Freelancers Association**. The EFA also has coverage in some other places. Check them out at <http://the-efa.org>.

The **Author’s Guild** has several insurance plans for members. These vary by state. Contact 212-563-5904 or staff@authorsguild.org for more information.

The **National Writers Union** is again offering group health insurance, but it isn’t available everywhere. They have a special website just for insurance: <http://nwuhealth.org>.

Another group listed in the WD article is **Fractured Atlas**, which serves artists and arts organizations in the U.S. Their health insurance availability varies by state. Get more info at <http://fracturedatlas.org>.

If you check out any of the above sources, let us know what you find out at webmaster@iwoc.org or jpkinnan@comcast.net. Keep in mind that some professional organizations have membership requirements that not all writers can meet. And remember, just because coverage is available doesn’t mean it’s cheaper than what you have or that it’s as good a value for the money — don’t forget to add in membership costs. Read the fine print and make sure the provider is legitimate, reliable, and licensed to do business in your state. You can get this info from the state insurance commission. Ask them about any complaints lodged too.✎

Note: You may wonder why we’ve listed sources that cover only New Yorkers or why we’ve said “your state’s” something or other. We’re proud to say IWOC has members in New York and in Wisconsin and Indiana, as well as in Illinois.



Calendar

August 14

It’s IWOCFest! On the rooftop of Pegasus Restaurant in Greektown, 130 S. Halsted in Chicago. Rain or shine. Cash bar, family-style dinner, and free dinner wine. It all starts at 5:30 PM. Cost is \$25 per person with advance reservations; \$30 at the door. Pay by PayPal or send check to office. Links for either at http://iwoc.org/iwoc_events.htm. Nonmembers are most welcome. See you there!

September 11

IWOC Monthly Meeting. Election of officers and a program on how to put more creativity into your writing. Details to come. Visitors welcome. National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan, Chicago. Networking at 5 p.m., program at 6. IWOC members free; nonmembers \$15.

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.

August 23 (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.

September 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 info, call Esther Manewith at 773/274-6215.

It’s Happening on the Web!

Check Out Writers’ Line

Browse Resources

See What’s Doing in IWOC Events

WWW.IWOC.ORG