

## Making Sense of Peculiar Words & Phrases

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

BY RICHARD L. EASTLINE

I Didn't Know That / Karlen Evins / 156 pp. plus introduction / Scribner, rev. 2007 / \$11.00 (small format paperback) / ISBN-13: 978-1-4165-32387-5.

We treat them as friends, even though we may not know much about them. And we sometimes put them in awkward situations, thinking we're doing the right thing. Who are these reliable, if somewhat not-definable, companions? They're all of those peculiar expressions — or odd words — that are so often used when making emphasis in comparisons or standing in for more commonplace terms. You've adopted many of them in both your writing and speech: "dressed to the nines," "make no bones about it," "loophole," "side kick," "dark horse," "windfall," and dozens of others. Ever thought about where they come from? Karlen Evins did and then gathered together her findings on the origins of things we say.

Previously published as two separate volumes in the early '90s, the contents have been updated to include many contemporary sayings. Altogether, she's compiled a wandering collection of some 300 examples, all colorful in purpose whether friendly or otherwise. In some instances, there's an historical link to the expres-

sion and in other cases, the phrase or word resulted from a mistake in reading or listening. Evins devotes a paragraph (sometimes nearly a page) to her explanations but steers away from citing specific sources for most entries. Her prose is workmanlike and fits the informal approach probably better than a "scholarly" descriptive style.

Take, for example, the terse but vivid entry for "lollypop" (pg. 73). In England, even today, "lolly" is an alternate for "tongue," so when a piece of candy pops in and out of your mouth as you suck on it, you have added the name of a resulting sound to the word identifying its location.

As for phrases, here's a lively one that remains popular: "ball park numbers." Just before the 19th century, ball parks became popular for more than just sports events. Political candidates chose them as venues for speeches because of their seating capacity. Inasmuch as tickets were rarely used for such programs, reporters resorted to getting estimates

of crowd size. Aided by optimistic guesses by a candidate's party leaders, these figures tended to be approximate at best and, more often, exaggerated.

Even the visual appearance of the pages contributes to an inviting environment for a casual and comfortable sampling as the mood strikes. No more than two entries occupy every small page, each being placed in a display panel and often accompanied by a simply drawn line illustration.

For most writers, this is a book that would not qualify as an ongoing reference, but on the other hand, who but writers would have the innate curiosity to delve into the real meanings of phrases and odd words that lend themselves so well to non-technical communication? More than simply providing the origin answers, Karlen Evins' venture into this sidebar of language also helps all of us as we create prose by clarifying the conventionally understood meanings with the real stuff. ♣



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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/HARRY KARABEL

# On Children, Tomatoes, and Sticking Around

Maybe you've had the occasion to visit someplace where you used to spend a lot of time. You return and you notice immediately that things are not the way they used to be.

The house you grew up in is somehow smaller. It used to be easier to fit inside it. Now it doesn't seem to have room for you.

The movie theater where they used to show double features, where you could kill a stupefyingly hot summer afternoon in the soothing, ice-cold chill, get blissfully lost in glorious Technicolor, and eat your fill of popcorn and candy all for about four dollars, is now a used-carpet warehouse. That intoxicating aroma of fresh-popped corn has been replaced by, well, you know exactly what carpet smells like.

Your schoolyard has disappeared because they had to add on to the school. They added so much that they took out some of the surrounding houses to do it. There's a teachers' parking lot. But no swings or slides. (Before, children could launch themselves off the swings and plummet into an oblivion of broken bones. And what are we teaching children when they go down a slide? That life after elementary school is a downward spiral? Shouldn't we teach them to slide up?!!) No gravel where you might run too fast and skin a knee, tear up your good school pants. And you wonder, with fear and trepidation, is there no recess?

You can no longer visit the lake where you spent the very best summer days of your childhood at Boy Scout Camp. The Chicago Area Council sold all of the expensive property that surrounded Lake Owasippe, the camp's namesake. And now the place where you learned how to paddle a canoe, took the mile swim, and passed the Lifesaving merit badge is now home to motorboats and jet skis, piers strung with Japanese lanterns, and cocktail parties. The eagles that once nested in the tallest trees along the shore have fled. The fish suck gas fumes. No Scouts allowed.

It's quite a different thing to leave a place and not go away, to still be a part of that place and be able to watch it change and evolve and grow in subtle ways. If you have children, or nieces and nephews, you know what I'm talking about.

When you see them day-to-day you can't always see them grow. You can't always see them lose a sliver of their childhood and patch it with a piece of themselves as adults. You can't always see their skills build one upon another until one day they show you how to make a perfect orange roux for baked pork chops, or load a new operating system, or cope with pain and disappointment, or play a guitar lick in an oddball key just like *The Edge*.

Each year, you tell yourself that you are going to get your tomato plants in the ground in April. You only have room for six plants. It's not that big a deal. But each

year, you don't get to it until the middle of May. And as you plant and fertilize, you tell yourself that this year you're going to spend more time keeping the weeds out, making sure the vines have plenty of support and protection, and keeping them well watered. And each year, you spend more time walking by the plants than tending them, until that first day you look over and notice shades of red and orange peeking through the green.

Right about the time football season rolls around you have more tomatoes than you know what to do with, and the end of summer becomes a glorious celebration of your harvest: bacon and fresh tomato sandwiches on wheat toast, sliced tomatoes and corn with every meal, and juicy tomato salsa with jalapeños and chips as you watch the Chicago Bears grind up the Midway. If you had made that April deadline for planting, the tomatoes would be gone by now.

And then you remember that the good things, the best things, are worth waiting for. You remember that you can always do better. But you also remember that good seeds take hold, and good things grow. And you remember that some things are more easily left behind than others. That's how you identify the things in your life that are the very best. You may leave them, but you cannot bring yourself to go away.

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as the pres-

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## Such a Party!

BY JOEN KINNAN



IWOCers made merry at our annual summer bash at Pegasus in August. The weather was glorious, the food scrumptious, and the conversation sparkling. Clever — and thirsty — revelers pounced on the wine IWOC provided, so who needed a cocktail? We all wolfed down incredible amounts of Greek delicacies. (We noticed some surreptitious belt adjustments as the feast wore on.) It was a lovely evening, as our candid camera shows. Thanks to president Harry Karabel for organizing this fine fete and to Bob Manewith for taking the pictures.



Tom Lanning, Roger Reuff, and George Becht



Ann Kepler, Bob Hashioka, and Jennifer Oatfield

For lots more pictures, click on [http://www.iwoc.org/iwoc\\_events.htm](http://www.iwoc.org/iwoc_events.htm) and go to the recap story. ♡

## 2007-08 Officers & Board

Members unanimously elected new officers at the September meeting. Thanks to the nominating committee for bringing together a fine slate. The new officers, who were immediately installed, are:

**President — Roger Rueff.** Roger served as IWOC's vice president this past year. He is a technical and business writer, a writing teacher, and an award-winning dramatist.

**Vice President — Catherine Rategan.** Catherine co-founded IWOC in 1981, and she is a past board member. She writes scripts, multimedia content, web content, and other materials.

**Secretary — Diana Schneidman.** Diana is a current board member and also the author of the most recent Rate Survey. Diana writes about financial and insurance matters.

**Treasurer — Barbara Dillard.** Barb is our current treasurer, a job that she has also held on past boards. She writes in the insurance, law, not-for-profit, and healthcare areas.

**Parliamentarian — Harry Karabel.** Harry has been president for three terms. As retiring president, he becomes parliamentarian. Harry writes creative copy and marketing communications for all media.

**Board Member — Jim Hodl.** Jim is leaving his post as program chair to join the board. Jim writes marketing and after-market support materials for trade publications.

**Board Member — Jennifer Lyng.** Jennifer has been active in IWOC since joining. She specializes in health and fitness, sports, business issues, and personal profiles.

**Board Member — Noreen Kelly.** Noreen has previously served as public relations chair. She works in the areas of change and internal communications and public relations.

**Board Member — Chuck Coffin.** Chuck served on the directory committee this year. He works as an editor and proof-reader as well as a writer for publishing clients.

**Board Member — Joen Kinnan.** As webmaster, Joen sits on the board. She also currently produces *Stet*, and she is a past president. She is a healthcare writer and newsletter producer.

IWOC wishes to thank retiring board members **Marla Kruglik**, **Ed Bouchard**, and **Paula Shevick**; retiring secretary **Ellen Krupp**; and retiring parliamentarian **Jim Leman** for all their hard work and dedication. They will be missed. ♡

### Sad News

We regret to report that there have been several deaths among our IWOC family recently. Roger Reuff's father died quietly in his sleep at his home in Denver on August 27 at the age of 85.

Veronica Hinke's father died in July after a difficult illness. He lived in Wisconsin.

Jennifer Lyng lost her grandmother, *Sun Times* columnist and radio and TV personality Dorsey Connors Forbes, who died on September 5.

IWOCers extend their deepest sympathy to Roger, Veronica, and Jennifer and their families.

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## President's Column

Continued from page 2.

ident of IWOC for the last three years and to help our organization continue to grow. I do not believe in luck as much as I do in providence, and I believe it was providential that we were so well supported by the various members of the IWOC board these past three years. A good board makes the president's job easy. Your commitment and insight made the job so much easier than I ever expected. Whatever we have been able to accomplish we certainly did together. Thank you.

Once again, we have surrounded our new president, Roger Rueff, with a great board and I am sure that continued growth will not be a problem. We'll probably grow in some different directions. I hope we do. I'm only going as far as the chair next to the president, the one labeled "parliamentarian." I don't know what that means, but I'm definitely going to find out. In fact, I wouldn't miss it for the world.

Peace be with all of you,

Harry Karabel 🍀

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## September's Question of the Month

BY KAREN SCHWARTZ

### What is the best thing about being a freelance writer?

**Leigh Page:** I am my own boss, which means I have my own work hours, I don't have to commute and I have some control over vacations. And when a client is very difficult, walking away from the gig is infinitely easier than quitting a full-time job. I rarely walk away from a client, but it's nice to think I could if I had to. That gives me a great deal of power. In a full-time job, I could be relegated to an area I don't much like. I wouldn't have much control over changing it. But as a freelancer, I have access to a variety of different experiences that help keep me happy with my work and give me a chance to grow.

**Kevin Orfield:** The best thing about being a freelancer is being your own boss and setting your own schedule.

### What are some of the challenges you face being a freelancer?

**LP:** The answer is, again, that I have to be my own boss. I have to find health insurance coverage, file quarterly income tax payments, make sure people pay me and, most important of all, find work for me to do. And despite these extra responsibilities, I notice that most clients pay at lower rates than if I were on a full-time salary. When the work comes in, it comes in waves. Sometimes I am waiting on a project with little to do; at other times I'm so overwhelmed that I'm wondering if I can meet the deadlines.

**KO:** Also, the most challenging thing is being your own boss and setting your own schedule.

### What are the solutions to these challenges?

**LP:** A couple of years into freelancing, I am still falling short of meeting all the challenges, but I know what I need to do. Some answers are straightforward. For example, high-deductible insurance takes some of the sting out of premium payments, and services like IWOC can help find clients. Other challenges have to be readdressed constantly. For example, finding work means regularly contacting prospective clients

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## Calendar

### October 9

#### IWOC Monthly Meeting.

Bring business cards! Speaker Adam Istas from Imagination Publications is an editor for this electronic and print media publication company, which works exclusively with freelance writers. They have 70+ publications that cover a plethora of subjects. Visitors welcome. National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan, Room 4012, Chicago. (Make a note of the room number; it will be our permanent room.) Networking at 5 p.m.; election at 6, followed by the program. 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](mailto:webmaster@iwoc.org).*

### September 27 (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.

### October 4 (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.

and directly talking to them and finding services that can help. Low-paying clients have to be replaced by higher-paying ones. And deadbeat clients have to be made to understand — without offending them too much — that they need to pay up. While some freelancers flourish in a specialized niche, it makes more sense to have a variety of skills to offer. However, that requires breaking into new markets, which is a bit like the chicken and the egg. You have to have experience to get a job in a certain area, but how do you get the experience? Other challenges don't have a solution except just plain hard work. Handling a large wave of assignments simply means working on weekends and evenings. But keeping your own work hours is what freelancing is all about. **KO:** I'm pretty self-motivated and diligent about keeping regular office hours. You have to be to run your own business. But I wouldn't trade the flexibility this lifestyle affords me for anything. 🍀

**IWOC Welcomes New Member Frank Nottoli**