

# Stet

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

## NOVEMBER MEETING

### *Crain's Focus Editor to Tell Freelance Needs*

BY LORI PARKER

It's official: The October launch of the new "Get Hired" campaign was a rousing success. Adam Ista and Meredith Landry, senior editors at Imagination Publishing drew a capacity crowd to last month's IWOC meeting. If you weren't there (and why weren't you?), you can read all about it in David Epstein's wrap-up on page 3.

In keeping with the "Get Hired" theme, November's speaker is Laurie Cunningham, editor for "Focus," the features section of Crain's Chicago Business. Crain's is one of the most prestigious business news and analysis publications in America. It boasts an international readership. Focus covers topics ranging from entrepreneurship to law to commercial real estate and finance, all on a weekly basis and most written by -- you guessed it -- freelance writers.

As features editor, Laurie Cunningham oversees a staff of reporters writing stories on topics that run the gamut from the piano-moving business to influential lawyers. Cunningham supervises some of Crain's biggest projects of the year, including the annual "40 under 40" feature and "Fast 50,"



profiles of

Chicago's fastest growing companies. A world traveler, she treks to countries like Brazil to write stories about what Chicago companies are doing to capitalize on emerging markets.

Cunningham will talk about what she looks for in a writer, what irritates her, and how we should approach her for assignments. She'll also provide insight into trends forming in Chicago businesses. She'll let us know what the hot topics are, which ones need more coverage, and which ones are suffering from overexposure. Afterward, there will be plenty of time for questions and answers. Once again, I advise you to bring your business cards.

Each month, the Program Committee strives to feature people and businesses

that regularly hire freelance writers, editors, researchers and proofreaders. In order to meet this goal we need your help. Please contact my co-chair, David Epstein, or me with any contacts you may have for literary agents, editors, or publications currently looking for freelancers. Help us keep these monthly programs vital and informative.

This is the time and IWOC is the place to broaden your client base, build a network of professionals, and learn editorial preferences. Mark your calendars now for the second Tuesday of the month, every month and get ready to "Get Hired."

The November 13 meeting will be held in Room 4012 (fourth floor), National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago (across from the Art Institute). Networking – with beverages and snacks – begins at 5 p.m., the program at 6. The meeting is free for IWOC members and \$15 for nonmembers. Visitors are cordially invited. Plan to join us afterward for a buy-your-own dinner at a nearby restaurant to continue networking and talking with the speaker. ♡

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/ROGER RUEFF

# You Never Know



In his 1997 book, *The End of*

Certainty, physicist Ilya Prigogine (Nobel Prize in chemistry, 1977) thrusts a well-honed sword deep into the heart of "Laplace's Demon" and leaves it lying lifeless at the mouth of its cave. In laymen's terms, Laplace's Demon is the notion that if one knew the position and momentum of every particle in the universe at a given point in time and also knew all of the equations governing movement and particle interaction, one could predict the exact state of the universe at any point in the future—as well as reconstruct its state at any point in the past.

Or, as the marquis Pierre Simon de Laplace himself put it, "We may regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its past and the cause of its future. An intellect which at any given moment knew all of the forces that animate nature and the mutual positions of the beings that compose it, if this intellect were vast enough to submit the data to analysis, could condense into a single formula the movement of the greatest bodies of the universe and that of the lightest atom; for such an intellect nothing could be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present before its eyes."

So there.

Although Laplace never actually referred to his hypothetical "intellect" as a "demon" (that tag was applied later by his biographers), the image makes sense given the era in which he lived (1749 to 1827). For those of us who dwell in the 21st century, the analogous "intellect" is more likely to be thought of as a computer. Regardless of image, however, the notion itself is important, because it implies that the future state of the universe (and, by inference, each event in every human life) is already set in metaphorical stone. In other words, the future is completely knowable—we just don't know enough to know it. Our inability to predict what will happen in the future is merely the consequence of our limited capacity for knowledge.

No offense.

Most people find the notion of a deterministic universe grating, because we like to think of ourselves as having free will. But there it is—an idea put forth by a scientist and mathematician on the order of Isaac Newton—and if it's true, then free will is merely an illusion.

Enter Ilya Prigogine.

As a physicist specializing in non-equilibrium thermodynamics, Prigogine was an expert in entropy—the tendency of the universe to move toward increasing disorder (think of your office desk or kitchen table). And that expertise led him to argue that science treats time incorrectly. Specifically, he demonstrated that time



is not a "fourth dimension" through which one can move back and

forth—and that it is, in fact, something special, with a directional arrow that points only one way... into the future. You can't unbrew a pot of coffee or unmix a milkshake (or unsend that email you fired off in a moment of anger... a word to the wise).

The implications of Prigogine's premise are profound, because if it is correct, then the universe is not deterministic at all—it's probabilistic. The Demon is free to predict what might happen, but he can never predict what will happen. In other words, it's not that the future is knowable and we just don't know enough to know it—it's that we can't know the future because it is, by its very nature, unknowable.

Time to warm up that coffee now. (And keep in mind, you can't un-warm it. You can let it grow cold again, but that's not the same thing.)

It's possible that Prigogine had the freelance writing life in mind when he formulated his arguments. (I didn't say "likely"; I said "possible.") If he did, he was no doubt thinking about the surprising and often fruitful connections that sometimes arise out of nowhere when you take on a project or make an acquaintance that might seem at first glance of no special importance and/or not worth your time.

*Continued on page 5.*

# Custom Publishing 101

## EDITORS AT IMAGINATION PUBLISHING DISCUSS THEIR FREELANCING NEEDS AND CAVEATS

BY DAVE EPSTEIN



A capacity crowd greeted Adam Istas and Meredith Landry, senior editors of Imagination Publishing, at IWOC on October 9, as they explained custom publishing. Their informative presentation was frequently enlivened by amusing verbal ping-pong between them as they described their different approaches. They and the other eight Imagination Publishing editors all

*The usual pay rate is \$1.00 per word.*

demand well-researched professional articles suitable for industry experts in one of the many fields represented by their corporate and association clients.

Imagination Publishing, founded in 1994, is a leader in custom publishing, which delivers personalized communications to niche audiences in specific industries. Modern publishing, printing, and web technology enable the 50-plus publishing professionals at Imagination Publishing to custom-tailor each of approximately 70 publications to a very specific audience. This demonstrably increases the marketing return on investment (ROI) for the client company.

The in-house staff, all publishers, editors and

designers, work in account-specific teams and know their respective subject areas. There are no in-house writers, so they need dozens of skilled outside writers. Istas uses about 30 freelancers each month. Once a writer proves to be good and reliable, Imagination Publishing editors like to build long-term relationships and often share good writers with colleagues.

Media Bistro is one of the favorite places to scout for writers. Writers simply must have their own web sites, because that's where an editor will look next for the writer's biography, capabilities, and samples.

For initial contact, both Landry and Istas suggest calling first and following up by email. If interested, they will ask for a resume and samples. Starting with email is not a good idea, as editors' email files are choked. Landry finds email "intrusive" and prefers the personal connection of hearing a voice on the phone. Paper mail is as dead as the "house organ."

Most of their products are B-to-B publications aimed at a particular client's customers or professionals in their industry. Media include online and print periodicals, special publications, and web-only content, such as an ezine that Landry edits for a major telecommunications manufacturer. Three years ago, web content was 10 percent of custom publish-

ing volume. It is now 30-40 percent. There is a growing trend toward using more "rich" or mixed media, such as webinars and podcasts.

Their typical publishing cycle is 16 weeks. Editors assign a budget or word count. The usual rate is \$1.00 a word (for the assigned word count) paid on publication. Necessary assignment expenses are reimbursed, when invoiced. "Kill" fees are 100 percent for articles the editor considers good that are cancelled for some other reason and 33 percent for submissions deemed unsatisfactory.

Writers must understand that each article must meet the specific needs of that Imagination Publishing client. Landry, Istas and their fellow editors are in touch with their client contacts daily and work out story ideas with them in advance. Serious research is essential, as readers are experts in their fields. Every article gets edited, with comments and changes coming both from the editor and the client. Most articles go through two revision cycles. Writers can make all this easier by communicating clearly with the editor.

Writers need to demonstrate creativity, flexibility, professionalism and "verve." Imagination Publishing editors value writers who suggest good ideas unsolicited. They initially provide some industry contacts to interview. After that, they expect

the writer to be resourceful and "figure out solutions" to any problems that arise.

Deadlines are generally 3-5 weeks, and have to be met. Writers must stay in touch with their editors, give regular progress updates, and know when to raise questions. A writer who goes MIA during an assignment is not invited back. (This does not happen often but does create opportunities for back-up writers who can work fast.)

"Roses" that the editors appreciate include clear "reader-friendly" writing, solid reporting, effective self-editing, ownership, and accountability. They expect accurate sourcing and fact checking and will check quotes with sources.

"Thorns" to avoid include excuses, getting stuck and not telling the editor, writing errors, factual errors, and articles that are too long or too short. Other very sharp thorns are one-source stories, using "experts say," relying on quotes to tell the story, editorializing, wordiness, exclamation points, and rhetorical questions.

For more information, visit the web site of the industry association, the Custom Publishing Council, which was cofounded by Imagination Publishing CEO, Jim Myers, at <http://www.custompublishing-council.com/>. Imagination Publishing's own site is at <http://www.imaginepub.com/>. 

# Things You Never Knew about your Colleagues

BY KAREN SCHWARTZ

*November's Question of the Month: Given that work ebbs and flows in a freelancer's life, what writing-related projects and other activities do you tackle during down times or between jobs?*

## **Katherine Mikkelson:**

Because I dabble in all different kinds of writing, I never seem to be at a loss for projects – albeit some of

 them are not paying. If the corporate (and best paying) work is not coming in, I turn to my feature writing. I research article ideas, make preliminary phone calls to sources, check out new markets, and write queries. If that doesn't lead to an assignment, I always have my fiction. I'll edit a chapter of my recently completed novel or outline an idea for a new short story. My problem is finding enough time to squeeze in all of these interests especially since the extracurricular (read, non-paying) writing is what I really love and what keeps me sane.

**Harry Karabel:** What we get to do for a living is deliver creative fire to our clients.

 In order to do that on a regular basis with some success, we have to constantly stoke that fire, give it fuel, and keep it hot. You never know when you're going to be asked to deliver that fire, and you always risk the possibility that if you don't deliver, you won't get asked again. Every year, when my accountant asks me what work-related activities might be deductible, I try to convince him that my entire life should be deductible: every experience, every trip to the store, every movie,

every walk in the woods, every gallery visit, every family dinner, and every new CD provides fuel for that fire.

So when I'm not working, I fuel the fire in as many different ways as I have time for. I went to film school, and there are always 50 or 60 movies on my must-see list. I read a lot of fiction. I go to museums and galleries whenever I can. I spend time in the woods or walking on the lakeshore. In the summer I get my hands dirty in the garden. I write fiction. I get into deep, philosophical harangues with friends who are literary and music critics. I struggle constantly with my personal philosophy and theology, both of which involve quite a bit of study. And I take time to be the best husband and dad that I can be. All of that activity fans the flames.

I also write, sing and play music in a Christian rock band called Into the Light ([www.intothelightband.com](http://www.intothelightband.com)). Last year we made our first album. We are currently working on a Christmas EP and starting in January, we'll begin work on our next album. The band is not making money, and we really don't care. We are having the time of our lives. We play benefits, county fairs and festivals, and of course, Sunday services. It's a blessing to have this kind of creative outlet that doesn't have anything to do with writing speeches or websites or training programs or any of the other things that I get

paid to do. Of all the things I do between jobs, the sheer joy of making music really keeps that fire burning bright.

**Brent Brotine:** About two years ago I started looking into mystery shopping, exactly for the reason of having something interesting to

 do during down times. Since then, I've progressed into a niche that has been a lot of fun from both the experiential and the writing sides.

One of the mystery shopping companies I was working with on restaurant reviews gave me the opportunity to try this specialty side of their business, and it's been an interesting way to combine business with pleasure. The typical hotel assignment is three days/two nights, with my expenses reimbursed plus a travel stipend. For example, as an independent,

I can afford to go to New York to judge the ECHO direct response awards or attend conferences because I can usually snag a hotel review assignment for the same dates.

However, I have to warn everyone that this is long, detailed work. I normally have to turn in an 8,000-word narrative report plus completed checklists and dozens of digital photos, all done on a strict timetable while making sure I keep my cover. But then again, I've had the opportunity to stay in places that I otherwise would seldom visit, like the Chateau Marmont in Los Angeles. If anyone is interested in the field, I'd recommend starting doing restaurant reviews (the simplest assignments to get) with a consulting firm and working your way up. 🐾

## **IWOC HOLIDAY PARTY — DECEMBER 11**

**WHERE:** Cafe Iberico, 739 N. LaSalle, Chicago

**WHEN:** 6:30 p.m.-??

**HOW MUCH:** Same as last year: \$35/person

**FOOD:** Delicious hot and cold vegetarian and nonvegetarian tapas & a scrumptious dessert

**DRINK:** Cost includes sangria with dinner. All other drinks require cash (bring money)

**WHAT ELSE:** A visit from Santa bearing gifts

**COMING SOON:** A flyer with more details & a reservation form to pay by check. Also an online PayPal form. Watch for these.

## President's Column

Continued from page 2.

Many of us have personal stories that illustrate the principle of this-led-to-that-which-I-could-never-have-imagined. In my own case, the most glaring example involves the sequence of events and connections that led to my authoring a produced film—The Big Kahuna—and forming friendships with theatre professionals around the world.

In a nutshell, in the summer of 1991, I took part in a “deadline workshop” at Chicago Dramatists—wherein six playwrights are given six weeks to write a 30-minute one-act play involving six actors. The playwrights were assigned to two directors, and by chance, I was assigned to a director named John Swanbeck. John and I enjoyed working together, so I showed him a play I had just finished called Hospitality Suite. John liked the play and (without my knowing) showed it to his friend, Kevin Spacey (pre-Tony-award). Kevin set up a reading in New York, which got me an agent who sent the play to South Coast Repertory Theatre, where it premiered the following April. In 1997, Kevin called me from the set of The Negotiator to ask if I would be interested in adapting the play to film. Two years later, the film premiered at the Toronto Film Festival and, since then, has been shown around the world—which has led to productions of the play in Canada, Japan, Croatia, and Italy and friendships across the globe.

I remember standing in my kitchen on a summer afternoon in 1991 deciding whether or not to accept the invitation to participate in the workshop—thinking through what it might involve with respect to my schedule and whether I could afford the time. By saying “yes” instead of “no thanks,” I unwittingly set my life and career on a course I could not have predicted. In this case, that course has taken me to some very good ports of call.

I mention all this because it speaks to the wisdom of sometimes taking on assignments that might not have immediate, obvious, short-term (or long-term) appeal. Each of us has his/her own standards regarding what constitutes an acceptable project—and standards have their places in the life of the writer. But one can never predict what hides behind the plain façade of an uninviting project. A dead end? Maybe. A live end? Maybe, too. The future is simply unknowable.

So the next time you're thinking of turning down an assignment or a meeting because it doesn't fit a set of standards you've defined for yourself, take a moment to consider the world according to Ilya Prigogine. Those standards might be locking doors of opportunity. Past might be prologue, but it doesn't tell you a thing about climax or denouement.

The fact is, you just never know. 🍀



**Stet is not published in December**  
**Happy Holidays from IWOC**

## Calendar

### November 13

**IWOC Monthly Meeting.** Lori Cunningham from *Crain's Chicago Business* will speak. Cunningham is the editor of FOCUS, the section of *Crain's* that concentrates primarily on small businesses. She will talk about her needs and what she looks for in a freelance writer. Bring your business cards!

### December 11

**IWOC Holiday Party at Cafe Iberico,** 739 N. LaSalle, Chicago. Cost: \$35 per person. Hot and cold tapas, dessert, sangria, and a visit from Santa. Further details to come. Mark the date now. Nonmembers welcome.

*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).*

### November 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.

### December 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.

### November & December

**No IWOOP Monthly Lunch** (holidays). Normally near-west suburbanites meet at noon on the 4th Thursday of the month for lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park. We will regroup in January. 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**