

## OCTOBER MEETING

*Google 101 for Journalists and Writers:  
Insider Tips on Web Research*

BY DAVID EPSTEIN

Come to our October 12 meeting so you can Google at Google.

Jointly presented by Google and Independent Writers of Chicago and hosted by Google, this program lets IWOC members and guests look behind the scenes at the offices of Google Chicago. At the same time, Jake Parrillo, Google's Midwest Manager for Global Communications and Public Affairs, will demonstrate how writers, journalists, serious researchers, and fact checkers can use more efficient and productive tools and resources to find, sift, and use information on the web.

And the most exciting news is ... that Google actually has physical offices ... let alone in Chicago.

'Fess up now. Didn't you secretly believe that Google dwells on a lofty cyber-cloud somewhere above Silicon Valley—that Shangri-La of the Information Age? Actually, if you follow the link below (found on Google, of course), you'll discover that Google, Inc. has many earthly dwelling places: <http://www.google.com/>

corporate/address.html

One of these locations is a



minute's walk from the center of the world—namely, Michigan and Wacker. (What—you thought I meant that town on the narrow island between two dirty rivers?)

Other folks may use Google search to locate stores and restaurants or answer trivia questions or settle bar bets, but for serious writers and researchers, Google really is a kind of magical Shangri-La or Fountain of Truth (if you know how to sort out Truth from Truthiness, that is). Google didn't invent the Information Age, but Google tamed it.

Let's not even talk about combing through library stacks or newspaper morgues, sneezing from getting dust up your nose, to pin down some essential fact or reference. Just go back to 1995 or so and remember all the different search engines you had to deal with, and the conflicting results you had to sort out—not to mention never being quite sure you had tapped the key source.

Back then some of us

Continued on page 4.

*Special Time, Special Place*  
*Google Chicago, 20 W. Kinzie, Chicago,*  
*17th floor, 6:00-8:00 p.m.*  
*Meeting is free to all comers, but you*  
*must pre-register on the IWOC website.*

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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](http://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 ©2010 by Independent Writers of Chicago.

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/ROGER RUEFF

*There will be no president's column this month because, as most of you know, Roger and Jennifer Lyng got married on October 2, and strangely enough Roger seems to have better things to do this month than pen the column. I'm sure that everyone in IWOC wishes Jen and Roger the happiest of marriages.*



**Y**our editor is desperate for something to put up here in place of the column so she can get this rag out there before the occurrence of tomorrow's happy event, e.g., the great Google tell-all. Said editor has been whooping and hacking like a crane — the bird kind, not the motorized variety — since last Thursday. (Here's a stock market tip: go for the tissue industry or perhaps waste management. They're both in high demand.) Anyway, due to her flagging health, editor-woman is woefully behind in just about anything you can think of. She just went on the internet to see if she could steal something from some competent writer that would be relevant to us freelancers. She found lots of articles about freelance writing, but unfortunately, most of the writers who tell other people how to be writers seem to have gotten their creativity from the backs of cigarette packs.

There was something interesting, though. Who knew there's a plagiarism website — no, not one plagiarism website, but hundreds — where you can check your work to see if you've inadvertently written *War and Peace* or *The Great Gatsby* without realizing it? Apparently, one can check one's work for free, at least on some of the sites, so this is the hot tip of the day: If you find yourself spiritedly plinking out, "Fourscore and seven years ago," and you have no idea where *that* came from, hie yourself to Google and type in "plagiarism" before you find yourself in an orange jumpsuit that's too tight in the crotch. (Could writing the word "plagiarism" be plagiarism? After all, you didn't think of it first.) Egads, what a worry! To think that one might blithely put down, "First quarter profits are up 14 percent" and find oneself clapped in irons by the gendarmes. Wonder if it's worth investigating to see if anybody's written, "this is close enough to the end of the page." Nah, who'd write a dopey thing like that, especially when this 14-point type is doing the job. ♣

# Writing a Best-Selling Biography: It Takes Tons of Research, Perseverance, and a Fresh Angle

BY SARAH KLOSE

**B** lame Louis Armstrong. His rapid-fire music rhythms pulsed through Chicago's nightclubs. Al Capone relished hearing electric jazz in his speakeasies, and Louis Armstrong called Capone a jolly fat man.

Jonathan Eig originally wanted to write about the blistering trumpeter. He hoped to combine that with a biography of the 1920s notorious gangster. But while Armstrong grabbed his attention, Capone commanded it. Still, Eig thought, "Do I want to spend years with the guy, having him inhabit my dreams?" Since he had not found a well-rounded portrait of Capone, the answer became yes. The result is Eig's new book, *Get Capone*.

At the September 14 IWOC meeting, the Chicago author elaborated on his subject.

"Every book I'd seen portrayed him as a monster," Eig said. "But Capone wasn't as bad a guy as I thought. He was much more nuanced than I expected."

While doing a Lexis Nexis search, Eig learned about George E.Q. Johnson, the U.S. district attorney assigned by President Hoover to go after Capone. A *Chicago Tribune* article mentioned that a Nebraska college professor had Johnson's papers -- letters and wiretaps from the Capone era. Eig called the professor, who suggested they co-write a book about Johnson. While acknowl-

edging that Johnson "was the real hero," Eig instead bought the materials from the professor and hauled them back to Chicago.

"I knew that I had something new in hand and could get a book advance," Eig said.

Eig also secured Capone's tax records. Others had tried, but the IRS always refused. By the time Eig asked, a



new lawyer was on staff. He viewed Capone's records as a civil matter, not a criminal one, and released them. Eig uncovered other information, such as data on the St. Valentine's Day massacre and on Edward O'Hare, who was murdered by Chicago gangsters.

"That first year, I didn't do any writing for the book," Eig said. "I was just reading extensively about Capone, and taking notes."

As far as previous books to his credit, Eig wrote biographies of Lou Gehrig and Jackie Robinson. He said that there was a definitive book out on Babe Ruth, but not on Lou Gehrig. Eig found ground-breaking Gehrig information that became key

to his book.

"A memorabilia catalog had a listing of the letters Lou Gehrig wrote to his doctor," Eig said. "I tried contacting the owner, auctioneer, and finally the person who lost out to the winning bidder. He gave me the name of the new owner of the letters."

Eig googled the owner's name, spelling it all possible ways. He found an article about the man, contacted him, and pitched to him the importance of putting the contents of the letters into the public domain. The man agreed to give Eig access to the material.

As he shaped his story, Eig was careful not to prejudge Gehrig. He knew that others described him as quiet. Interestingly enough, "in the end, I saw that he actually was thoughtful and shy, so I portrayed him that way."

For two years, Eig's opening chapter told of Gehrig attending the opera, and his wife realizing he was sick. Finally, Eig realized that since it was a baseball book, he had to open with a baseball scene. He scrapped the opera opening, and rewrote the beginning of his book to open at the ballpark.

For his book on Jackie Robinson, Eig learned of a tiny apartment the ballplayer shared with his wife and

new baby. It was located in an undesirable part of town. From that image, he honed in on the slugger's disenfranchised feeling. While doing extensive research, Eig came across information that indicated many ballplayers tended to embellish their playing time with Robinson. He came to believe this was probably to convince themselves they were on the right side back then — Robinson's side.

Former colleagues at the *Wall Street Journal* helped Eig nail down an agent. For his *Get Capone* book proposal, he submitted a 130-page chapter. The publisher also required a chapter-by-chapter outline. Eig said his editor is talented, hands-off and very fast. "He edited my Jackie Robinson book over Thanksgiving weekend."

The former magazine and newspaper scribe said he writes "by torture. I throw away lots of material." Writing a book can be simplified if the author breaks down the task, Eig said. He views it as similar to writing a long series of magazine articles.

Authors are hugely involved in promoting books these days, Eig said. He set up a Facebook page and a Twitter account for *Get Capone*. He has a blog and "an iPhone app for a Chicago gangland tour, with all kinds of plugs for my book."

Certainly those are different than the plugs Capone was known for. 🍷



*October Meeting, Continued from Page 1.*

turned to WebCrawler, the search engine that searched the search engines, and that helped some, but.... By the way, for WebCrawler fans, it's still around—in a fashion. I found it at <http://www.webcrawler.com/>, and it searches Google, YAHOO!, Bing, Ask, etc. The latest entry I found on a page headed WebCrawler Timeline reads:

2001 InfoSpace acquires WebCrawler. Excite, now Excite@Home, went belly up. In the bankruptcy, Infospace acquired WebCrawler. Today Infospace runs WebCrawler as a meta-search engine. And they've given Spidey a new name and turned him purple!

How did I find this fascinating bit of nostalgia—in mere seconds? You guessed it: "Who ya gonna call?"

In just twelve years since Larry Page and Sergey Brin began developing Google in a garage (yes, really) in Menlo Park, California (named for the town where Edison did his magic), their brainchild has become a wide-open doorway to information, photos, and videos from around the globe, and maps and satellite images of that globe—plus vast storehouses of official and unofficial data and statistics. There are literally more things in heaven and earth and

Google than were dreamt of in Horatio's—or anyone's—philosophy.

Whether you write for print, video, broadcast, or online media, whether you're in journalism, business writing, marketing, or public relations, you need to know how to use Google more effectively, how to locate just the information and images you need, and where to find government and industry information resources you didn't realize you could reach through Google. You will walk away from this session knowing new tools, techniques, and online resources to be more productive with Google Search, Hot Trends, Insights, Reader, News, Maps, and more. "Google 101 for Journalists and Writers" will sharpen your online research skills as never before.

And once you master Google Earth, you—along with Sarah Palin and Tina Fey—will truly be able to say you can see Russia from your house—or at least from your desktop, laptop, or iPhone!

The meeting will run from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Google Chicago, 20 West Kinzie in Chicago. Google will provide light refreshments. Plan to stay for a buy-your-own dinner afterward at a nearby restaurant. ☘

## Calendar

### October 12

**IWOC Monthly Meeting.** A special meeting at Google Chicago, 20 West Kinzie. Come at 6, stay till 8, and learn about Google's online resources for journalists and writers. Plan to stay for a buy-your-own dinner at a nearby restaurant afterwards. The meeting is free for everyone, but you must pre-register on the Coming Events page on the IWOC website.

### November 9

**IWOC Monthly Meeting.** Details TBA. The meeting will be held at National-Louis University, Room 5033, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Program 6 p.m. Networking 5 p.m. Nonmembers, \$15; IWOC members free. Buy-your-own dinner follows. Nonmembers welcome. For more information, call 847/855-6670 or visit [www.iwoc.org](http://www.iwoc.org).

*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).*

### October 26 (4th Tuesday)

**IWOOP Monthly Lunch.** Join near-west suburbanites for a noon lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park. For more info, call Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065. Check before you come. This lunch is monthly only if there are enough people who can attend. Note: The lunch is now on the 4th Tuesday, not the 4th Thursday as it had been in the past.

### November 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.

*On Friday, October 15, anyone who has not renewed his or her IWOC membership will disappear from the website and the IWOC membership rolls. You may rejoin at any time, but why not renew now and save the time and trouble? It won't take 10 minutes.*

**It's Happening on the Web!**

**Check Out Writers' Line**

**Browse Resources**

**See What's Doing in Coming Events**

**WWW.IWOC.ORG**