

Stet

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

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IWOC'S JANUARY MEETING

Annual IWOC Roundtable

BY JAMES J. HODL

Attendees invited to share their strategies at IWOC Roundtable Session on January 10th.



There is a certain romance to being a freelance writer. Even the term “freelance” conjures up days long past when European kings, needing to enlarge their armies in times of war, issued a call to all knights free to leave their homes and regular chores to bring their lance and go on the great adventure. (In fact, this is where the term “freelance” originated.) And once reporting for duty, these freelances would gather around a large table in a great hall (some guy named Arthur


reportedly had a round one) where they would share information on the latest strategies.

So it is appropriate that, like freelances of old, IWOC each year stages a Roundtable Session to give members and other willing knights of the pen the opportunity to share information, be it how to secure additional paying work, collect bills, or handle a difficult client. But unlike in the past, this year's Roundtable, set for Tuesday, January 10, will have a twist. Attendees will help set the agenda.

As always, the Roundtable will present some interesting problems for attendees to solve. Devised by longtime IWOC member Jim Kepler, these puzzles will present real situations that freelance writers can encounter. Working in small groups, attendees will devise their own solutions and share them with attendees in other groups.

But for a change of pace, halfway through the Roundtable, attendees are invited to share real problems they have encountered, and to ask other attendees who may have faced these same situations to share information on the strategies they used to resolve the problem to their advantage.

So bring yourself, your questions and your knowledge from experience to the 2006 Roundtable Session at the IWOC meeting on Tuesday, January 10 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 begins at 6 p.m. Admission is free to IWOC professional members; \$5 to associate members, and \$15 to nonmembers.

Following the meeting, attendees are invited to go to a nearby restaurant for a buy-your-own dinner to further discuss Roundtable topics or to continue networking. 

**IWOC Roundtable
Tuesday,
January 10
Chicago Athletic Association
12 South Michigan Avenue,
7th Floor, Lakeshore Room
Networking 5:00 PM
Program 6:00 PM**

**Professional members free
Associate members \$5
Nonmembers \$15**

**IWOC meets for programs and
networking the second Tuesday of
every month.**

iWOC

Independent Writers of Chicago

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Charting Our Success

BY HARRY J. KARABEL

When I was growing up, we had what still seems to be a fairly unique approach to making our Christmas wishes known. We would wait patiently for the Sears Wishbook, which seemed to come some time in November. Then, we would pore over the pages endlessly, searching for those items we most wanted Santa to bring.

Then, right after Thanksgiving, we would cut out the most fervently desired items, glue them onto a piece of construction paper, attach a little note to Santa and draw lines underneath all of that to the bottom of the page. Each time we performed any sort of outstanding good or gracious act, mom pasted a star on one of the lines. The idea was that if the chart were filled with stars, Santa would surely know we had been good to a degree beyond the dreams of avarice and would leave all the items pictured. We were supposed to have the chart filled with stars by Christmas Eve.

This was also an endeavor "fraught with eminent peril" as W.C. Fields once said. Any infraction of the rules could lead to a dreaded **BLACK MARK**. This was an asterisk, drawn in black grease pencil, on the chart where a star should be. Legend had it (and my parents were in charge of perpetuating that legend) that for each black mark, the Clause would save one of the chart items for some other, more deserving and obedient child. Or, he might decide to leave nothing at all. It was hard to know what was communicated between Parents and Santa with that dark, foreboding symbol, and who knew what lurked in the mind of the Clause? He had one night to do a lot of work. The chart made it easy. The **BLACK MARKS** made it even easier.

Somehow, I escaped the wrath of Clause and got my Lionel train set, my Fort Apache, my Daniel Boone Flintlock Rifle and all those other carefully chosen items. I never suspected that my parents managed to allow me the freedom to choose while staying within their budget. I never suspected the chart was a manipulative parenting tool. I kept my old charts and I look at them each year to remind



me of who I used to be and what I used to value. But my wife and I decided not to put my own children through the same tradition and ordeal.

My personal Christmas was pretty successful this year, even without a chart.

I am completely impossible to buy for, but my family always manages to surprise me. I did get the new Beatles book (and will have all 800 pages read by the time you read this) and the new live Wilco album. I guess I dropped enough hints.

But if I had had to make an IWOC chart and count on Santa's grace and vision to overlook all my **BLACK MARKS**, I would have to say that IWOC's Christmas was successful as well. This year's cutout pictures, accompanied by my usual pleading prose, enabled the Jolly Old Elf to be his usual and generous self. Here's what he saw:

The Board, seated around a table in the Lakeshore Room on the 7th floor of the Chicago Athletic Club: Jim Leman, Joel Kinnan, Paula Shevick, Diana Schneidman, Roger Rueff, Ed Bouchard, Dixie Watterson and Ellen Krupp were taking their mission seriously and their roles positively. No one could ask for a better, more dedicated and hard-working Board.

There was another pic of Paula and Joel on the phone, working out the last minute details for the Christmas party, surrounded by piles of wrapped books from their personal collections. (Nice touch. Does any writer ever have enough books?)

Noreen Kelly, Laura Stigler, Kathy Vyn and Katherine Mikkelson are grinning ear-to-ear in another paste-up. Noreen's grin is the biggest, because she got the PR Dream Team she always wanted. But they're all smiling because they love their work and can see the impact of their hard work.

Mary Madigan doesn't have time right now to look up at the camera. She's too busy getting out this edition of Stet.

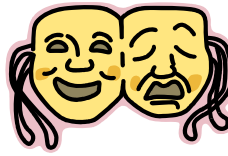
(Continued on page 3)

The right mix of chemicals

BY ELLEN KRUPP

Technical writer-turned-playwright Roger Rueff shared his formula for a successful transition with attendees of the November meeting.

Roger Rueff, award-winning playwright and film scriptwriter, rejects the popular expression “meteoric rise” when talking about his own success. He wisely notes, “meteors fall!”




- Serendipity
- Chutzpah

As he told IWOC members about some of his experiences—working with doofuses, the constraints of having only 15 minutes to sell a story and an idea to the money people, and finding out who are the good people in Hollywood—Roger demonstrated how he’s been inspired, worked hard, experienced both good and bad serendipity, and mostly left the chutzpah to others.

STRUCTURE IS THE KEY TO ANY WRITING PROJECT

Roger also shared something surprising: there’s a similarity between writing for stage and screen and the more mundane kinds of work most of us do. He finds that determining the correct architecture is the key to the project. If you get the structure right, everything else will fall into place. And while many of us think “people hear what they want to hear,” Roger said that it’s really about expectations. The writer’s job is to set up expectations for the audience—whether it’s comedy, mystery, fear, or romance—then deliver what he’s led them to expect. If you do that, your audience will be happy with what they’ve seen, heard, and read.

For Roger, the mixture of science and entertainment seems to be a winning combination. His engineering background trained him to look for principles, analyze why something works (or doesn’t work), and figure out how it works. He applied those skills to technical documentation, and now it’s working for him as he writes for stage and screen. 

Perhaps it’s his background in science and engineering that provides this insight. Roger has a Ph.D. in chemical engineering and is a technical documentation writer. His career as a writer for television, the stage, and film started as a hobby and a break from his day job. He first got involved in theater as an actor while he continued to write poetry, short stories, and plays (including the obligatory story about his own life and angst). More serious writing came as Roger joined Chicago Dramatists, a professional theater group devoted to developing playwrights and new plays.

Through a friend he met there, Roger was able to show his play *Hospitality Suite* to Kevin Spacey, who was so interested after reading it he said, “I could do this play for a year and never fully know the character.” It took awhile, but the play finally made it to the stage. Even better, Roger found an agent and later adapted *Hospitality Suite* into a screenplay for *The Big Kahuna*, a film starring Danny DeVito and Kevin Spacey.

FOUR ELEMENTS NEEDED FOR SUCCESS

As a newly minted veteran of the entertainment business, Roger explained some of the lessons he’s learned. He’s found there are four ingredients to writing for stage and screen:

- Inspiration
- Perspiration


(Continued from page 2)

A very dapper Jeff Steele looks up from the welcome table, also in the Lakeshore Room, ready with that smile and handshake that tells everyone, but especially our guests, that we really ARE glad to see you.

Sheree Guyer, Jim Hodl and Richard Eastline are huddled together, working out the details for the next few months of IWOC meeting speakers.

And there’s a pic of Mary Ann Porcuznik (a former IWOC President) dressed in her own Santa gear with a bag full of presents for all the good (star-worthy) IWOC boys and girls who attended the Christmas party.

There are other photos: Diana, Rebecca Maginn and Diana’s son poring over the results from the rate survey; Joen and Ed staring at computer screens, Diane Rowland searching for new entries for the job line; *and all those photos of people doing good, hard IWOC work whom I have inadvertently but inevitably forgotten, and whose pictures BELONG on this chart!*

I want to thank all those folks for making it easy for Santa to make some of my Christmas wishes come through. I have an even bigger list for 2006. I’m thinking about getting a bigger piece of construction paper. And hiding that grease pencil. 

ANNOUNCEMENT

IWOC Website to Feature Press Room

BY NOREEN KELLY

Plans are in the works for IWOC's Website to feature a Press Room, which will post past press releases issued by IWOC. You'll see some of the major news releases that have gone out recently, including IWOC's silver anniversary (November 2005), Freelance Writer's Life Conference (March 2004), and the online directory (July 2004).

The Press Room will inform current members about IWOC and serve as a helpful aid in recruiting new members. When you refer prospective members to IWOC's Website, they will have a chronological record of IWOC's activities and successes.

The news releases posted on the new Press Room will help tell IWOC's story—it's time to boast!



IWOC MEMBER IN THE NEWS

IWOC Member Garner Recognition for Video

IWOC member Lynn Sanders has received mentions in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Times*, *USA Today* and *Chicago Tribune* for a public awareness video aimed at helping people avoid infections and medical errors. The video, "Things You Should Know Before Entering the Hospital," aims to save lives by teaching patients to become active participants in their healthcare while they are in the hospital.

Copies of the film are available on DVD or video tape at www.patientsafety.com.

Two dollars from the sale of each copy will go to CAPS, an organization that envisions a safe, compassionate and just health-care system.

IWOC Welcomes New Members

IWOC recently grew stronger, with the addition of new member Ava Whaley and the return of former member Barbara Hughett.

Welcome, Ava and Barbara. We're delighted to have you, and we hope to see you at our monthly meetings.



BOOK REVIEW

Another Day—Another Word (Again)

BY RICHARD L. EASTLINE

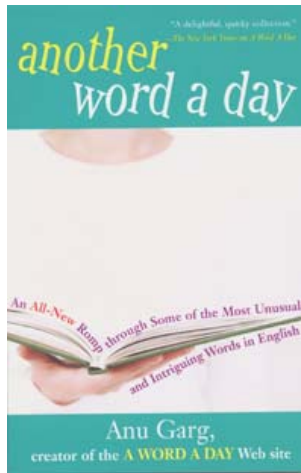
This is yet another review in an irregular series devoted to books and Internet sites that are popularly classified as reference source material.

Another Word a Day/ Anu Garg/ 226 pp. incl. resource appendix and index/ John Wiley & Sons, 2005/ Paperback, \$14.95 list/ ISBN 0-471-71845-9.

He's back, again. The man with the very non-English name proves once more that he's a master of our every-changing, ever-complex vocabulary. As the title suggests, this is a follow-up to a previous book covering similar territory. Both volumes are essentially spin-offs of Garg's phenomenally popular online service, *A Word A Day*, now in its twelfth year. Garg comes off as a gregarious professor of grammar, when in reality he's a Northwest-based engineer with an acute fondness for words, blessed with an inquisitive nature and a light-hearted approach that makes his offerings so addictive.

Subtitled "An All-New Romp through Some of the Most Unusual and Intriguing Words in English," that mouthful of adjectives only hints at the wonders that await the reader within 52 brief chapters. As if detailing and dissecting some 300+ words would suffice for his purposes, throughout the pages are sidebars that provide anecdotal accompaniments as well as "footnotes" that offer choice examples of quotations embodying memorable word usage.

The author intentionally selects words that are active, whether mainstream or uncommon, and run the gamut from borrowed to manufactured—even those that were created through misspellings. There is a stab at organization (which accounts for the high chapter count), but don't think of the sections as being independent. Rather, regard the dividers as momentary pauses before



continuing an enlightening and entertaining journey. The headings are there to whet the appetite. Consider, for example, the following: False Friends, Fishy Words, Metallic Words Used as Metaphors, Words That Aren't What They Appear to Be, or Words to Describe Your Opponents. All tasty menu items, to say the least.

Specifically, the approach used by Garg is to present each word with a pronunciation guide and its classification as noun, adjective, etc., before delving into its definition(s). What then follows is a terse example of usage and, with considerable frequency, anecdotal references from members of his e-mail community. One of the more memorable examples of the latter is the relating of a foreign diplomat's efforts to explain his wife's inability to produce offspring. He just couldn't seem to find the proper expression, so he said, in sequence: "My wife is impregnable. That is, she is inconceivable. I mean—she is unbearable!" And we wonder why we have difficulties in dealing with global diplomacy.

Consider this volume a reference or, better yet, an informal introduction to the world of Anu Garg. Whether or not you ever actually meet him, you can become an attentive disciple through his engaging fondness for words with all their inherent peculiarities, either via his published works or subscribing to his daily e-mailed "lesson." It's free (but contributions are welcome) at <<http://wordsmith.org>>.✍

Calendar

January 10 (2nd Tuesday)

IWOC Roundtable

Opportunity to discuss challenges of the freelance life and share strategies for success with other independent writers. At the Chicago Athletic Association, 12 South Michigan Avenue, 7th Floor, Chicago. Networking at 5 PM; program at 6 PM. Professional members free, associates \$5, nonmembers \$15.

The monthly food and networking get-togethers listed below meet at the same time and place each month unless otherwise noted. The groups welcome nonmembers.

January 5th (1st Thursday)

IWOP 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 information, call Esther Manewith at 773/274-6215.

January 26th (4th Thursday)

IWOOP monthly lunch: The West Suburban group meets at noon at Poor Phil's at 139 So. Marion, Oak Park. Contact Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065 for more information.

Check out
IWOC's Web site at
www.iwoc.org