

Stet

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

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IWOC'S MARCH MEETING

How a law professor wrote show biz history

BY JAMES J. HODL

Sometimes opportunity knocks where you least expect it. For Ben Alba, a full-time professor at the DePaul University College of Law, that opportunity led to the writing and publication of a most interesting book of show business history, *Inventing Late Night: Steve Allen and the Original Tonight Show* (Prometheus Books, 2005).

Alba will explain how this book came about and talk about the television pioneers he met along the way during his presentation "From Law to Late Night" at the IWOC meeting on Tuesday, March 14.

According to Alba, as commercial television came into being after World War II, nobody really knew what would work in the new medium. Early TV programs were essentially cameras turned on radio shows. NBC's first attempt at late-night programming, "Broadway Open House," was simply a vaudeville show broadcast after the late news.

Starting fresh in 1953, NBC called on comedian Steve Allen to try his hand at what was by then called *The Tonight Show*. Borrowing from his past experiences on radio and early television in Phoenix, Los Angeles and New York, Allen fashioned a free-wheeling, ad-lib format. The familiar elements of opening monologue, comedy bits and sketches, conversations with the audience, stunts, music from an in-house band, and celebrity interviews are still being used today by David Letterman, Jay Leno, Conan O'Brien and others.

Alba will offer recollections of his chance meeting with Allen in 1997 that led to Allen asking Alba to write a book based on his and others' recollections of how the Late Night TV format came about. These will include his meetings with those in on the creation, including Andy Williams, Bill Harbach, Stan Burns, Herb Sargent, Steve Lawrence, Eydie Gorme, Skitch Henderson, Louis Nye, Don Knotts and Tom Poston.

Also expect some videos of early *Tonight Show* craziness.

A native Chicagoan, Alba is a graduate of Archbishop Weber High School and Loyola University. Earning a law degree in 1983, Alba joined the law firm of William J. Sneckenberg &

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"From Law to Late Night"
Ben Alba
Tuesday,
March 14th
Chicago Athletic Association
12 South Michigan Avenue,
7th Floor, Crystal 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.

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FEBRUARY RECAP

Rx for writers' primary assistants, their computers!

BY RICHARD L. EASTLINE

Are you among the legions of writers trusting (or hoping) that their computers require no special attention? Call it the typewriter syndrome—faith in regarding it as just a working tool. If so, then you're doing wrong by your electronic helpmate. The audience at Jerry Bransfield's enlightening presentation at February's meeting learned that technophobes needn't shy away from essential housekeeping efforts. Writers, who rely most on word processing, may be surprised to discover how several effective, yet simple, routines can keep a computer performing contentedly.

EXPERT CREDENTIALS LEND CREDIBILITY TO PITHY WARNINGS AND PRACTICAL TIPS

Our speaker, the owner of a locally-based computer consulting service, 312-543-4427.com, has worked as both a network administrator and a programmer. With such credentials, his pithy warnings and specific suggestions came across as being practical as well as responsibly given. In making his presentation, Bransfield was careful to separate and define critical categories of the problems that relate to Internet use and those that arise from routine computer activity.

Covering the list of computer infections that run the gamut from viruses, worms, and Trojan horses to spam, spyware, and adware (all in growing abundance), he described their recognizable characteristics and effects after intrusion. These actions include deleting or garbling files and even using the victim's computer to transmit spam during inactive periods while still connected to the Internet. Our speaker then recommended available software programs and some hardware (such as routers) that would destroy or quarantine any such attacks. Interest perked up when he noted that problem-solving utilities were available as free downloads from reputable sites. Emphasis was directed to those of us who utilize current Windows operating systems and broadband services.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR KEEPING PCs PROBLEM-FREE

Even without exposure to the outside world, users will find that computers can develop ills that will slow performance and even be responsible for unexpected crashes. Bransfield went on to illustrate typical conditions and their recognizable results. Again, he followed this discussion with maintenance recommendations and explained that many of the most-needed tools already can be found in various system folders on every computer. He especially emphasized the overlooked

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MARCH PROGRAM

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Associates as an attorney handling insurance and product liability cases. He became a partner in the firm in 1990, but retired from the practice of law in 2002 to teach full-time at DePaul, where among other courses he teaches legal writing.

"From Law to Late Night" will be the centerpiece of the IWOC meeting on Tuesday, March 14 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 a nearby restaurant for a late-evening buy-your-own dinner to further discuss the night's topic or to continue networking. 



Computer consultant Jerry Bransfield gave tips for keeping PCs healthy and running smoothly.

COMPUTER PRODUCT REVIEW

More Rx Help for Your Computer

BY RICHARD L. EASTLINE

This is yet another review in an irregular series devoted to books and computer products popularly classified as reference source material.

For those who attended the February presentation by Jerry Bransfield—and particularly for those who did not—here are several more helpful utilities, free and otherwise, available for downloading. All of them originate from reputable sources and often are rated equal to more highly publicized products. Please note that many of these programs are limited to installation in Windows-run computers.



Download Accelerator, ver. 8.3 – Seeks out best server connections (mirror sites) for downloading and allows for a download to resume after an interruption. Free program from <www.speedbit.com>.


INTERNAL OPERATIONS

Digital “gunk” will accumulate over time in any computer, but this problem can be minimized through periodic maintenance procedures. Likewise, there are many small-size programs (seldom publicized) that will make certain performance features either more convenient or faster.

Clipboard Buddy – Store multiple copied text or image elements for pasting rather than just one at a time. Keep items for repeated use. It’s a free program from <www.iquestsoft-online.com>.

Post-It Notes – Just like the real thing, personal notes can be written via keyboard and will appear on your monitor screen until deleted. Get free or paid versions from <www.3m.com/market/office/postit>.

DoubleKiller – Free up hard disk space by removing unnecessary duplicate files. Program will locate, delete, or move them to another folder. Free or paid version from <www.bigbangerprises.de>.

PrintScreen – As you may have discovered, the Print Screen key doesn’t perform. This free utility will do the job, capturing whatever is on the screen and sending to your printer. <www.bls-software.com>. 

E-MAIL/INTERNET

Whether ‘net surfing or working with e-mail, you can become involved with Internet conditions that will affect (and even infect) your computer’s operating capability. Installing one or more of the following “policemen” will defeat the intruders or, in other cases, enhance your level of productivity.

Pop-Up Stopper, ver. 3.1.10 – If your own Internet provider doesn’t offer a similar utility to eliminate annoying website pop-up ads, get this free download from <www.panicware.com>.

LavaSoft Personal Firewall – From the maker of the popular anti-spyware program, Ad-Aware, this is an alternative to Zone Alarm for blocking hackers. Free trial, \$30 to buy at <www.lavasoft.com>.

MailWasher, ver.2.0.4 – Informs you of e-mails awaiting downloading so you can delete those you want before they enter your computer. Available free to try, \$20 to buy from <www.mailwasher.net>.

FEBRUARY RECAP


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accumulation of temporary files (from Internet surfing and software installation) that can and should be removed regularly. Windows users in particular were urged to check the various tools usually grouped (i.e., ScanDisk and Defragmenter) within the Accessories folder.

AUDIENCE REWARDED WITH ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS, VALUABLE TAKE-AWAY

Throughout the session and immediately afterward, questions were invited from the audience on the topics discussed in addition to other user-specific computer ailments. Almost nothing seemed to

faze the speaker and for issues that he declined to answer, he willingly suggested some sources that could be of help. One very special plus for those in attendance was distribution of a 19-page summary of problems and solutions that mirrored Bransfield’s presentation

Positive response to this program was borne out by its running over the allotted time. Given the nature of the program’s topic, there’s no difficulty in arriving at two significant conclusions: (1) those who declined to attend missed out on a session that was worth at least an hour’s consulting time, and (2) that a presentation doesn’t necessarily have to deal directly with writing or editing themes to be of financial value to IWOC members. 

MEMBER FEATURE

Computer expert restores peace between PC and writer

BY CATHY MACARTHUR

IWOCer Cathy MacArthur was so impressed with the computer help she received from last month's speaker Jerry Bransfield, she was moved to share her story with Stet readers.



It was an early Sunday morning, one of the quiet ones you read about but rarely experience after having kids. They were sleeping in, as were the pets. I was able to make a coffee and sit in my chair by the window and appreciate the peace of a late winter sunrise. Little did I know what an illusion that was.

I decided to 'pen' an email to an out of town friend I haven't seen in almost a year. I tapped away at my laptop, fully enjoying the anticipation of her response to all our family's news of the past year, and just as I was completing my last thought, my wrist leaned on something and the email disappeared. Gone. Where'd that go? I clicked on just about every key to try to get it back. It was history. So as not to destroy the moment, I typed off another, trying to remember what I wrote. It happened again. My E-mail just vanished. The moment was lost. My kids and their pets all came running, thinking my screaming was a call for breakfast.

Throughout the past year, I've had this email experience several times. I've explained it to friends, to writers (who you would think should know), to my teenage son (who you would think should know more than anyone), and they've all listened and nodded, but gave me no solutions. Where do these go? Who gets them? Do they read them? Don't you think they could at least send them back, like *return to sender*?

I've had more than this one annoyance with my computer. In fact, I've had multitudes of issues with my computer. But I've been so busy with the multi-tasking that rummaging through books referring to me as a dummy wasn't a task high on my priorities - rather, it was number one on my procrastination list. Anything technical was.

It was time to address the issue and get a pro. I'd thought about and discussed certain services provided by computer stores, but my past experiences have been that there wasn't always a lot of knowledge or experience behind those services, and I was paying for kids to roam around on my system and try to figure things out. And many times, things weren't figured out.

Then, I read the IWOC newsletter talking about Jerry Bransfield. I called and he came. Quiet and efficient, he straightened out my system without showing the merest distain for my neglect. But truth be told, my system could be likened to a frat house on a Sunday morning. What Jerry found was a mish mash of very scary sounding games that only a teenager would vie for, files and folders fanned out everywhere, music downloads (were they paid for, I wondered) and who knows what else.

Jerry updated my system, deleted all junk, he patched the flaws, updated the antivirus and everything else. He even identified the problem with my disappearing emails and showed me how to retrieve them. In little more than an hour, Jerry provided solutions to all the little annoyances I've put up with yet never bothered to address, and he ultimately made my laptop user friendly for me, instead of my teenager.

I told him I was going to write about my experience with him for the IWOC newsletter, but he said, "Don't write anything about me if you don't like me or my services." I'm writing, and I'm making a list of all the new additional features I plan to have him do when he comes back. Jerry has saved me time and money, and he's completely customized my computer to suit my needs.

I haven't since had another of those peaceful moments, but when I do, I will be ready. ✍️

MEMBERSHIP

IWOC welcomes returning member

Jane Davenport, a former IWOC member, rejoined us in February. Welcome back, Jane. We're delighted to have you, and we hope to see you at our monthly meetings.



Calendar

March 14 (2nd Tuesday)

IWOC Monthly Meeting:

"From Law to Late Night" with Ben Alba
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.

March 2nd (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.

March 23rd (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.



Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

March meeting in special location

For the March 14 meeting only, IWOC will be meeting in the Crystal Room on the 7th floor of the Chicago Athletic Association, not the Lakeshore Room. Please use the Madison Street elevators to get to the Crystal Room.

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