

# Stet

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

## JULY MEETING

### *Writing Documentary Film Narration: A Little-Known but Rewarding Field*

**LEARN HOW IT'S DONE FROM A LOCAL CHICAGO WRITER****BY JAMES J. HODL**

Film documentaries are noted for their moving images of people acting on their beliefs or facing adversity. But these images really become moving when they are combined with narration that establishes the storyline and sets the mood in carefully selected words. Though we don't often think of it, documentary film writing is yet another venue for the more creative among us to showcase our talents.

One person who has mastered this delicate art in combining words and pictures is Rose Spinelli, and she will be the speaker at the IWOC meeting on Tuesday, July 10 at National-Louis University.

In her presentation "Writing Documentaries," Chicago writer Spinelli will discuss this form of writing as well as some of her better work.

According to Spinelli, her curiosity and love of teaching through storytelling has fueled her 14-year career as a writer. The former "Chill Out" editor for *Time Out Chicago* magazine, Spinelli has had many arti-

cles published in national magazines, most recently *National Geographic*, *Cooking Light* and *Yoga Journal*. But her favorite work has been writing film documentaries, some of which have appeared on PBS.

Her most noteworthy assignment was as writer and associate producer of "Curse of the Mano River." Produced and directed by George Collinet Productions, the goal of this documentary funded by the U.S. State Department and the nation of Guinea and screened at the United Nations in April 2002, was to persuade the Security Council to continue sanctions on Liberia's then-president Charles Taylor, the architect of that nation's 12-year civil war. The film succeeded.

Spinelli, whose other work includes educational films, informercials and corporate videos, will discuss her craft and possibly show clips from some of her work. Attendees are invited to ask questions after the presentation.

"Writing Documentaries"

will be the centerpiece of the IWOC meeting to be held Tuesday, July 10 at National-Louis University, Room 5006, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Networking over coffee and gourmet goodies begins at 5 p.m. The main program, including a brief business meeting, begins at 6 p.m. Admission is free to IWOC members and \$15 to non-members.

Attendees are invited after the meeting to continue discussing the presentation or simply network with other independent writers at a nearby restaurant over a buy-your-own dinner. ☺

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**NEW MEETING LOCATION**  
**National-Louis University**  
**122 S. Michigan Avenue**  
**Across from Art Institute**  
**Room 5006**

NLU has state-of-the-art A/V equipment and a terrific location. Again in July we'll be in the auditorium — huge — so bring hordes of people. Our permanent room will be available for the next regular meeting in September. ☺

**iwoc**

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## BOOK REVIEW/RICHARD EASTLINE

# Certainly, There's a Word for That!

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

*The Meaning of Tingo* / Adam Jacot de Boinod / 209 pp. plus foreword / Penguin Books, 2005 / \$12. (small format paperback) / ISBN 978-0-14-303852-8

It's been said that those hardy souls who live closest to the polar regions have a plethora of names for snow, each defining the characteristic of size, speed of fall, intensity, etc. Human nature seems to dictate that when things or occurrences have extensive variations, but exist under a common name, there's an opportunity to define those individual "personalities" with distinctive names. The opportunity isn't always acted upon—but when it is, the resulting words often have no resemblance to their parentage. Indeed, what we often get is a trade-off where the logical is replaced by the colorful.

The English language abounds with a vigorous vocabulary that encompasses more kinds of things and actions than found in any other living language today. That doesn't mean, though, that we have a monopoly on word manufacturing. Not by a long shot. Anthropological research has shown that others who share our planet have gone beyond our often weak designations that apply to everyday life's objects and happenings. All of which brings us to the surprising contents of this intriguing book.

In his exploration of some 250 languages, the author's goal was to discover words for which there are no exact English counterparts. His reward was the gathering of a wildly diverse collection of words and phrases that

are amazingly descriptive while being funny (but so perfect), troublesome, or irreverent. They frequently express feelings, observations, and commands that we think about saying, but which would be blatantly tactless in conventional word structure. Whether they're more acceptably disguised as unfamiliar words may be debatable, but could they not be considered as opportune alternatives in many hapless social situations?

While Adam Jacot de Boinod makes a stab at dividing the book into chapters with fascinating titles (*It Takes All Sorts, Time Off, Below Par, Otherworldly*), you might just as well consider them as pauses or even pot holes, in the continuity. Just start anywhere and move through it all as you will. Ready for some action? Instead of using a tired expression of exasperation at a reckless pedestrian, lift up your voice and let "viande a pneux" pour forth. The French have the right idea; the phrase is "meat for tires." Or, as a cautionary note regarding being misunderstood, the Spaniards have adopted "bikini" but somehow have applied it to a toasted ham and cheese sandwich. (Imaginative, to say the least.) How about a word that describes a catchy tune you can't get out of your head? In German, it's a case of "Ohrwurm" (an ear worm).

Our author goes beyond

his promised delivery, too. Scattered throughout the pages are brief essays on language development and sidebars on oddities in word connotations—such as the practice of wearing certain clothing colors on specific days of the week (Thailand). But, the real value of this book is in wandering within the inviting labyrinth of word lore that he's created.

Given that English has a long history of raiding the storehouses of foreign vocabularies, our being introduced to the prized examples in de Boinod's book may be an early move to add significantly to our acquisitions. In that respect, the title of his volume is wryly appropriate. The word "tingo" comes from the Easter Islands and means "to take all the objects one desires from the house of a friend, one at a time, by borrowing them." How's that for economy in expression! 🍌

## IWOC DIRECTORY

By now you should have gotten the IWOC Directory (SourceBook). If you haven't, call the office (847-855-6670). Publication was delayed, so new members aren't in it, but we will be doing another one as soon as we finalize membership renewal. So everyone's profile will soon show up in print. This is an "interim" directory. Contact Joan Franke if you spot errors ([joan@joanfranke.com](mailto:joan@joanfranke.com)). 🍌

# Erin McKean Christens New Meeting Site with a Treatise on Words and a New Take on the Evolution of the English Language

BY PAULA SHEVICK

**D**o you know the word for a child who has lost his parent? *Orphan*, of course. But do you know the word for a parent who has lost a child? If you know the answer, or any other new words, e-mail Erin McKean, lexicographer and speaker at IWOC's June 12 meeting. (McKean's e-mail and other useful websites can be found at the end of this article.)

Erin McKean is chief consulting editor of American Dictionaries for Oxford University Press, and the editor of *VERBATIM: The Language Quarterly*. She was the editor-in-chief of *The New Oxford American Dictionary, 2e*. And she's the author of four books about words: *Weird and Wonderful Words*, *More Weird and Wonderful Words*, *Totally Weird and Wonderful Words*, and *That's Amore*.

McKean gave IWOC members some surprising, interesting commentary that changed our perceptions about dictionaries.

*What is the OAD and how does it differ from other dictionaries?* First, there's access to over 200 million words in the Oxford database. Then, there's the totally new arrangement of entries. The words in the *OAD* are arranged so that related meanings within parts of speech are grouped together. You can therefore easily

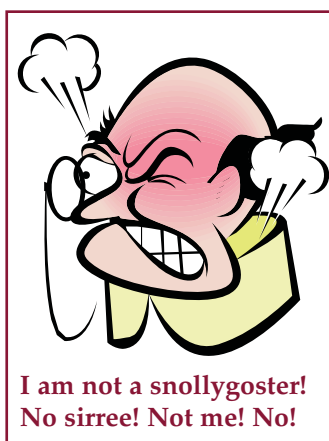
follow figurative or logical extensions of a word's meaning. This saves a lot of time navigating the entries.

*Where do you get new words?* To find new words, McKean reads "like mad" and trolls the Internet. People also are a source of words, which they e-mail to McKean. As a lexicographer, McKean also has access to lexicographers of other English dialects.

*How do you decide if a word is worth putting in the OED?* There's no human endeavor that does not come up with new words. The question is, will people other than a small in-group that created the word need to know the word? Will the word's use spread? To be considered useful, a word doesn't have to have only utilitarian values. It could also be used for entertainment.

*What is difficult about being a lexicographer?* To convince people that language undergoes vast changes — changes that are much vaster than when Samuel Johnson made his first dictionary. At that time there were 250 books published per year in London. Today the printing industry is \$25 billion a year. So it would be helpful to lexicographers to be able to scan novels. But copyright laws and fear of lawsuits make this prohibitive — even if lexicographers have no interest in plot

and other aspects of the novel. It would be useful to lexicographers if changes



were made to the copyright pages of books giving lexicographers explicit right to scan them.

*As the author of books on weird new words, what is your criterion for choosing such words?* The fascination of a weird word isn't just because of its spelling or its pronunciation, but in its sense. (McKean gave some wonderful examples of very weird words: *myomancy*—divination by the movements of mice; *snollygoster*—a dishonest politician; *spanghew*—to cause a frog or toad to fly into the air; and *chamade*—a signal inviting someone to a parley.)

*What does it take to be a lexicographer?* You have to love the guts of a language—the mess and illogic of it. Study linguistics and grammar. Learn about com-

puters. Read a lot. Read fast.

If you want to know more about Erin McKean, just Google her name and you'll find many listings, including several of her speaking on video. You'll really see what a fine, passionate personality she has. You can reach her at [www.dictionaryevangelist.com](http://www.dictionaryevangelist.com), [McKean@logocracy.com](mailto:McKean@logocracy.com), or 773-426-5938. Anyone who loves the art of the dress will also love McKean's [www.dressaday.com](http://www.dressaday.com). (In addition to her four computers, McKean owns three sewing machines.) If you want to suggest words to go into the *OAD*, go to [dictionaries@oup.com](mailto:dictionaries@oup.com). Also suggested: [On-line OED at AmericanNationalCorpus.org](http://On-line OED at AmericanNationalCorpus.org) and [www.languagegelog.com](http://www.languagegelog.com).

IWOC Welcomes  
New Members

Patricia Keegan  
Nancy Solomon

## IWOC RENEWALS

This is your last chance to continue uninterrupted IWOC membership. Some of you have promised to pay but haven't yet. Please do it NOW. We need to wind this up. Use PayPal or mail a check. 📧



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# Question of the Month

BY KAREN SCHWARTZ

## July's Question: How do you handle no-pay or slow-pay clients?

**Catherine Rategan:** On each invoice, I include my payment terms: net 30, 2% interest per month after 30 days. After 30 days, I send the invoice again, this time marked "Past Due." If I still get no answer, I call the client and/or the accounts payable department, asking when my invoice is scheduled for payment and reminding them that interest is accruing. That usually does the trick.

**Bill Gershon:** I will not take work from someone I don't feel comfortable with. I require an agreement in writing. I make a point of clarifying terms before the work begins. Does that guarantee on-time payment? No, but over the years I have had excellent compliance. If a check doesn't arrive when expected, I'll wait 7 to 10 days and call or send a statement. That will be followed by a phone call in another 7 days and a reminder of the agreed-upon payment terms. I do this in a friendly, businesslike way. Depending on the situation, I will not take work again from a client who, without valid reason, delays payment. The good ones don't play games with you. I deliver what I promise, when I promise, and I expect payment according to our mutual agreement.

**Rebecca Maginn:** Only once have I had trouble getting a client to pay. After a phone conversation and a letter that got me nowhere, I wrote the client about the well-past-due amount, adding at the end a "carbon copy" line with the name of a business acquaintance of mine who happens to be a lawyer. (I got his permission first, of course.) Just the "cc" at the bottom with a name followed by "Attorney at Law" seemed to be all it took. I got some money right away, and we worked out a schedule for payment of the rest.

**Diana Schneidman:** The first step in handling potential payment problems is to require partial payment upfront. I typically require payment of one-half at the beginning and the remainder upon completion. I may start work before the first check is received, but I generally receive it before any work is delivered. There are exceptions: small projects (totaling \$500 or less) and those where the terms are defined by the organization.

Second, define the conclusion of the project upfront in a signed contract or one-way e-mail. If I submit a draft and receive no feedback for two weeks, it's done! I send my final invoice. Here's what can happen if you don't do this: Clients can lose interest in projects midstream or simply fine tune the first draft on their own and run with it. If they don't answer your calls, you never receive confirmation that the work is "done."

Third, 30 days after the invoice was e-mailed, I call to determine if there is a problem. My calls become more frequent as time passes, especially if the client doesn't even answer my calls. If necessary, I call daily. I call early in the day so I can cross this off my to-do list instead of dreading it. However, the angrier I become, the easier it is to make the call. 🐦

*"Question of the Month" will ask IWOCers about issues common to the freelance life. Have a question? Contact [writerks@sbcglobal.com](mailto:writerks@sbcglobal.com).*

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# Calendar

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## July 10

**IWOC Monthly Meeting.** Rose Spinelli, who writes narration for documentary films will give us the nuts and bolts of writing for this market. Visitors welcome. National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan, Chicago. Networking at 5 p.m., program at 6. IWOC members free; nonmembers \$15.

## August 10

**It's IWOCFest!** You won't want to miss IWOC's annual summer party. Bring your friends, neighbors, and clients. Mark your calendars now. Details to come.

## September 11

**IWOC Monthly Meeting.** Election of officers and a program on how to put more creativity into your writing. Details to come. Save the date.

*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).*

## July 26 (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.

## August 2 (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.

## It's Happening on the Web!

Check Out Writers' Line

Browse Resources

See What's Doing in IWOC Events

**WWW.IWOC.ORG**