

Stet

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

OCTOBER MEETING

Need Work? This Editor Wants You!

BY LORI PARKER

As the new program chair (and sole member so far, but see the announcement below) of the Program Committee, I've chosen the theme "Get Hired" for the rest of 2007 and all of 2008. I believe that landing those lucrative assignments and interesting projects is an ongoing priority for most, if not all, members of IWOC. In order to accomplish this goal, however, we need to know where to go, with whom to talk, and exactly what they want. Therefore, each month, the Program Committee will strive to feature people and businesses that regularly hire freelance writers, editors, researchers and proofreaders.

With this in mind, our speaker at the October 9 meeting is Adam Istas, an editor from Imagination Publications, which is headquartered right here in Chicago. Imagination Publications hires their writers and graphic designers almost exclusively on a freelance basis. Istas is the editor for *Envisage*, a pharmaceutical and biotech magazine and *Synergy*, a magazine specializing in sales and marketing. These are only two of the seventy or so electronic and print media publications offered by this custom publishing house.

According to their website, www.imaginationpub.com, Imagination Publications is the only custom publisher that insists on systematically producing Return on Investment Publishing (RoIPSM) for clients. They define this as the art of pinpointing a company's RoIP goals first and then designing a custom publishing program to achieve those goals.

Their original editorial and creative content "is designed to move the behavior of target audiences" and has won more than 100 creative and industry awards. Their publications include magazines, webzines, annual reports, e-newsletters, and other print and electronic collateral for financial, association, consumer, business-to-business, and technology companies.

Their clientele spans the United States and includes more than 20 Fortune 500 companies as well as national and international trade associations. They have launched or re-launched more than 70 custom publications and recently produced a series of webcasts for Wells Fargo Bank. As you can see, there are plenty of potential assignments for freelancers with this company.

In addition to telling us



what he looks for in a writer, Istas will address his pet peeves and upcoming topics for his own as well as other company publications.

He assures us there will be lots of time for questions and answers. In addition to copies of his own magazines, Istas has offered to bring samples of a few of their other publications for us to look through either before or after the meeting. This company relies almost solely upon freelance writers so bring your business cards!

The October 9 meeting will be held in Room 4012, 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. ♡

Help with Programs

Join Lori Parker at 5:30 before the meeting if you want to be on the program committee, have a program to suggest, or want to help in any way.

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/ROGER RUEFF

Partners in Freefall

When I first left the corporate world to start freelancing, a friend of mine who had committed the same act years before passed on to me a bit of back-handed wisdom that some one had



shared with her when she herself started freelancing. "Congratulations," she said. "You've given up the illusion of security for the illusion of freedom." A cynical comment? Maybe. But say the same thing to any writer who's been freelancing for more than a few years, and watch his or her eyes light up in fraternal recognition of a fundamental truth.

It's not easy to make a living as a freelance writer.

It can be done, of course. The IWOC Writer Sourcebook (what most of us know as "the directory") is a testament to that. It's filled with the names of those who are earning their daily bread—or at least paying off the loan on the donkey that turns the grinding wheel—as freelance writers. It's just that making a living as a freelance writer takes... hmmm... what's that word... it's right on the tip of my tongue... oh, yeah... work.

Most jobs take work, of course, but not all jobs require the Swiss-Army-knife skill set necessary to make it as a freelance writer.

Very few jobs, for example, require the worker to hunt for a client, make a case for being hired, win the job, absorb new information, translate the information into understandable prose in time to meet a deadline, revise the prose as necessary to satisfy the client's desires (which might or might not match his or her needs), meet a new deadline, invoice the client, watch the mailbox for payment, pester the client about the check that hasn't arrived yet... and, oh yes, start the next work cycle before the last one is complete. There's prostitution, of course—except for the parts about writing prose and waiting for payment—but I'm talking about jobs that are legal outside the State of Nevada.

Not only that, the freelancer must serve as his or her own CEO, CFO, CTO,... C(fill in the blank)O... to make sure the taxes get paid, the insurance is kept current, the software is up to date, and the dog gets walked and wormed.

Is it daunting? Oh, yes. Frustrating? At times. Worth it? Without a doubt.

When I wrote the first paragraph above, I was being only mildly facetious in saying that my friend had "committed the same act" rather than simply "done the same thing" with regard to leaping from the corporate world to freelancing. The vault from one life to the other is a specific act that one commits. Even if the



freelance life sneaks up on you slowly, nibbling at an hour of your time here and a half hour there, tempting you with seductive fantasies of being your own boss, weakening you with tsk-tsk thoughts as you slog through a too-well-worn day, there comes a time when you make the decision to jump. Something opens that door at 11,000 feet and you look out into the wild blue yonder and think, "Y'know? I think I could do this." Then you gaze down at the checkerboard pattern of irrigated farmland two miles below, and a lump forms in your throat. And just when your second thoughts start to peck apart their shells, someone pats you on the back in congratulation and out you go.

And you suddenly remember all the synonyms for "plummet"... some in languages you don't even know.

But then you look around, and what do you see? The sky is filled with writers who are falling, just like you. The weird thing is, a lot of them seem to be floating, buoyed up on big white circles of billowing cloth, suspended on cords of some kind that seem to radiate from their shoulders. A few of them motion to you... something about a handle on your chest. You shout back, "You want me to pull what?" Then you remember that class you took before you climbed on

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How to Beat Writer's Block or "Can this Article Be Saved?"

DEAD. EVER HAD ONE OF THOSE WRITING DAYS?

BY DAVE EPSTEIN

At the September 11 IWOC meeting, Bernard Golden, PhD, explained the emotional and physical barriers to creativity and offered practical strategies for overcoming them.

His prescription for creative paralysis—including Writer's Block—is based on his expertise as a clinical psychologist, a teacher of other psychologists, and his own work as a writer. In the past eight years, he has authored or coauthored *New Hope for People with Bipolar Disorder* (now going into its second edition); *Healthy Anger: How to Help Children and Teens Make Sense of and Manage Anger*; and his latest, *Unlock Your Creative Genius*, which was the basis for his talk.

Golden works with many people, including artists and other creative professionals, helping them develop strategies for overcoming anger and depression to unblock their creative energies. The key to these strategies, he finds, is self-awareness, both of our emotions and our physical state.

Creative engagement demands courage, hope, will, and tolerance for frustration. We must manage the tension between mind and body. We need to feel positive, not negative, emotions. Our thoughts must be open and flowing, not critical and judgmental. Our bodily state needs to be energized, not

constricted or withdrawn.

Golden says, "Our freedom to be creative depends on our ability to effectively manage the tension that arises when we dare to create." He calls the very first moment of a creative venture "the moment of challenge." At this point, our minds and bodies oscillate rapidly between positive energy and inhibiting anxieties and self-talk accompanied by physical discomfort. Often we are overwhelmed by self-criticism and doubt.

In "Katie's Dilemma" Golden portrays a computer analyst who wants to write and illustrate a children's book. Looking at children's books in a bookstore, she thinks, "I can do that" or even, "My idea is better." But then she sees some wonderful books and suddenly thinks, "I'll never be able to do anything that good." Now, Katie is suffering from the Pulitzer Prize Syndrome, a paralysis caused by comparing her work to some perfect ideal. Her emotions swing back and forth between worry and hope. Physically, her muscles tighten up, and she becomes agitated.

At this point, creative people need to push the "pause button" and visualize clearly what they are feeling emotionally and physically. They should "turn up the volume" and really listen to what they are expecting about

performance and perfection. By doing this, they can calm and shut down the negative self-talk.

Creativity can be stifled by fear of failure, which may actually be fear of rejection or shame. We may be paralyzed by "child logic," unconsciously revisiting childhood experiences of being scolded.

Paradoxically, people can be equally paralyzed by fear of success, such as fear of surpassing a parent or being trapped in some negative behavior pattern by success. Golden described an artist who was reluctant to promote and display his work on his website. Through guided visualization, he discovered he was afraid he would be overwhelmed by demand for his works and would become a workaholic like his father. By visualizing his real fear, he was able to get past his creative block.

Visualization is a valuable tool for unlocking creative energy. To avoid getting stuck at the moment of challenge, do not dwell on the start of the process. Instead, jump ahead to visualize a more satisfying moment, maybe picturing a completed page.

Creativity also requires physical energy. Movement is the most stimulating activity, so a walk may help a writer get started. However, sleep can sometimes "tickle your unconscious" while

"gremlins" secretly clear away the creative blockage.

Write in a location that stimulates mind and body. Some writers favor Starbucks. Maya Angelou goes to a hotel room and spends all day alone writing ten to twelve pages, then comes out and hones them down to maybe two finished pages. In contrast, Stephen King needs heavy metal music to help him write.

Observe and understand your moods and your personal daily cycle, then fit your creative activities into this cycle. Golden suggests keeping a journal of your strengths and your successes each day, to learn what works best for you.

In the discussion following the talk, Golden was asked if there are ways to jump-start getting into the creative zone, and he suggested starting small. He had a patient who had bought a treadmill but was not using it. He suggested she stand on the treadmill for one minute, then the next day try two minutes. After a few days, the woman told him, "When I got to four minutes, I just started running."

Golden recommended three books on writing: two by Ralph Keyes, *The Courage to Write: How Writers Transcend Fear* and *The Writer's Book of Hope: Getting from Frustration to Publication*; and *On Writing* by Stephen King. ♣

Question of the Month

BY KAREN SCHWARTZ

Since you've become a freelancer, how have you gotten the majority of your freelance assignments?

Jennifer Oatfield: Almost all of my work has come mostly from fellow IWOCers or from an employer finding me in the directory, particularly since it went online. I also get some work from referrals from existing clients.



Jeff Steele: Since becoming a freelancer, the majority of my work has come from word of mouth.



That works two ways: editors and clients hearing about me from other people who hire writers and contacting me, and my hearing about prospective clients from other writers, PR people, and sources for articles. Word of mouth has worked particularly well for me.

But the second best way of gaining work has been through IWOC. I've gotten two great clients from my listing in the IWOC directory. One came my way in 1995 and is still a consistent client. The other arrived in 2004 and is now my single best client in terms of regular billings generated. I've gained two other clients, one a very consistent customer, from contacts made when I attended an IWOC event or monthly meeting featuring a panel of editors or corporate communications people who hire writers.

Jim Hodl: Since becoming a freelancer, I've found that cold calling is the best way to get new assignments. And you don't even have to use the telephone in some

cases. My first two freelance assignments came from driving out to two publications in Lombard and introducing myself to the editors—both of whom I already knew, but they didn't know I was no longer a fulltimer.

Of my current three biggest clients, two gave me my first assignments after my cold calling them. And once they liked my work, they began calling me with additional assignments.

When cold calling, it pays to think on your feet. As you make proposals, try to get a feel for the publication's needs, then propose something that meets one of those needs. The best proposals are those that offer a different slant. For instance, by 1998, all consumer magazines had done articles on extended warranty agreements, but I sold *Good Housekeeping* on an article that included information on how to shop for the best extended coverage at the best price.

One way to increase the chance of breaking into new publications is to keep the same phone number and e-mail address. Whenever I cold call, I follow up with a letter or simply give someone (in person) my business card. Since 2004, I've broken into several new publications because editors who saved my card at one magazine changed jobs. Then one day when someone wanted a writer who specialized in household products, for example, that person dug out my card and contacted me. 📧

Free Programs You Can Use

BY JOEN KINNAN

With free programs, you often get what you pay for. These, however, sound like they might really be useful, though we haven't tried them yet.

Adobe Reader lets everyone view PDF files, but "view" is the operative word. You can't add notes or mark them up in any way. Enter Tracker Software's free PDF-Exchange Viewer. With this program, you can add text and graphics, attach sticky notes, highlight, circle mistakes, and do other kinds of markup. You can't create a PDF from scratch, but hey, what do you want for nothing? (www.docu-track.com/home/prod_user/pdfx_viewer/).

PhraseExpress is a macro utility that stores your boilerplate and pastes it into any Windows program. Its AutoText lets you create code words that automatically produce your street address, your standard lame excuse for why you didn't make the deadline, or any other phrases. You can also import AutoCorrect and AutoText settings from Word, but you'll need to turn off Word's AutoCorrect when you use it or you'll see the entry twice. Free from Bartels Media at www.dirfile.com/publisher/bartels-media.html.

Here's one for the researchers and bibliophiles among us. Who doesn't have little scraps of paper floating around

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Member News . . .



IWOCers **Ann** and **Jim Kepler** have been busy lately. Ann's most recent book *Living the Healthy life* has won a National Health Information Award from the Health Information Resource Center, a national clearinghouse for consumer health programs and materials. The book also won a Web Award from the Web Marketing Association for its publisher. Not to be outdone, Jim has taken the plunge and developed a blog for the couple's book packaging company Adams Press (adamspressblog.com).

Jane Ranshaw is going places near and far. On October 20, she'll be at the Cultural Center in Chicago for the Women's Press Association Book Fair to hawk her books *Quick Guide to Grammar and Style* and *101 Tips for Marketing your Services*. Then she'll jaunt off to the Cayman Islands to teach an American Management Association writing course for the Tourist Bureau there. This is *work*?

If you've just gotten a cushy assignment, won an award, or otherwise have news you'd like to share, send the information to Joen Kinnan at jpkinnan@comcast.net. We'd also like to list your blogs so other members can see what you're writing about. So send those URLs along too.

President's Column

Continued from page 2.

the plane. You yank the handle, there's a loud rustle of fabric, your harness jerks, and lo and behold, you're floating... just like the ones who gave you the advice. You give them a thumbs-up, and one of them waves you over, shouting, "Follow us... We'll show you where there's an updraft!"

By the way, those big italicized, lowercase letters on their parachutes? Take a good look.

They spell i-w-o-c.

This is my view of IWOC, just so you know. It's why I joined in the first place—not simply in the hopes that someone would point me to the ripcord, but to become part of the group that knows the way to the updraft... and to equip myself to help others find their way there.

The organization whose helm I inherit is healthy and robust. But, like all such organizations, it could be healthier and robuster. (If you attended the June 12 meeting and heard the presentation by lexicographer Erin McKean, you would know that I'm well within my rights to make up words like "robuster.") My predecessor, Harry Karabel, performed splendidly in the post and was greatly aided by a fine and hard-working board. I, too, am blessed with an excellent board, and I look forward to working with them. (In the August *Stet*, Harry wrote that they have me surrounded—an image that, at first blush, made me want to reach for some mace.)

In the coming months and years, I will keep you posted on our direction and progress as an organization. I can tell you right now that the board will be generally focused on two main goals—to strengthen IWOC's usefulness as a job source for members and to build membership itself. The two go hand-in-hand, of course. As we progress toward one goal, so will we progress toward the other.

I can also tell you that in the coming months and years, you will find in this column repeated invitations to help out, even in small ways, in making IWOC work. All great religious traditions stress looking outside yourself and giving back to the world—and although IWOC is not a religion (not even close), the principle applies. We're all stronger when everyone pitches in.

And by the way, if you use that line about the illusions of security and freedom with a novice freelancer, be gentle. It's meant to be a brotherly/sisterly reminder, not a pronouncement of doom. 🍀

Free Programs

Continued from page 4.

with cryptic notes about books someone has recommended or tomes that are vital to a project? The free Book Collector from Collectorz.com can help you organize this mess and find these volumes. When you enter the author, title and/or ISBN, Book Collector searches for it in databases from Amazon, the Library of Congress, and other sources. BC will download info, including publication date, plot synopsis, and even cover art. You can even add your own notes to the entry. You can search your collection by title, author, and several other categories. The free version allows 100 entries, but the full version is only \$40. Get it at collectorz.com. 🍀

Calendar

October 9

IWOC Monthly Meeting. Bring business cards!

Speaker Adam Istas from Imagination Publications is an editor for this electronic and print media publication company, which works exclusively with freelance writers. They have 70+ publications that cover a plethora of subjects. Visitors welcome. National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan, Room 4012, Chicago. (Make a note of the room number; it will be our permanent room.) Networking at 5 p.m.; the program at 6. IWOC members free; nonmembers \$15.

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. Save the date and bring your business cards!

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.

October 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.

October 25 (4th Thursday)

IWOOP Monthly Lunch. Join near-west suburbanites at noon for an outdoor or indoor lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park. 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