

# Stet

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

## JUNE MEETING

### *Words that Aren't on the Tip of your Tongue and References You Didn't Know Existed*

#### EXPAND YOUR VOCABULARY AND YOUR REFERENCE TOOLS

**BY JAMES J. HODL**

Is there a word that most perfectly fits the thought or idea that you are trying to get across in an article? And are there reference materials available that one can check to verify a nettlesome fact?

Expect Erin McKean to have the last word on both subjects during her presentation, "Quidnunc: Little Known Reference Materials," during the next IWOC meeting on Tuesday, June 12, at our new meeting location, National-Louis University.

McKean likes to call herself a "dictionary evangelist." She is chief consulting editor of American Dictionaries for Oxford University Press and editor of *Verbatim: The Language Quarterly*. She was editor-in-chief of the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2e, and is the author of *Weird and Wonderful Words*, *More Weird and Wonderful Words*, *Totally Weird and Wonderful Words* and *That's Amore* (yet another book about words). McKean also has served on the board of the Dictionary Society of America and

the editorial board of the American Dialect Society. She currently serves on the advisory board of the Wikimedia Foundation (which reviews online additions to the Wikipedia encyclopedia).

Through her work, McKean has come upon some pretty unusual reference books that even veteran writers may not have heard about. And she is very willing to share knowledge of their existence with writers, including where they can find them.

Since McKean has a passion for words and writing, she will likely share her opinions on the state of word skills among today's population, some of whom have even taken to using the dread e-mail shortcuts, such as LOL, in their prose.

"Quidnunc: Little Known Reference Materials" will be the centerpiece of the IWOC meeting to be held Tuesday, June 12 at National-Louis University, Room 5006, 122 S. Michigan Ave., corner of Michigan and Adams (across from

the Art Institute), Chicago. It's only a block south of our former meeting location, Why not drop by at 5 p.m. to network with other professional freelance writers over pre-dinner snacks — no cookies this time — and beverages? The main program, including a brief business meeting, begins at 6 p.m. Admission is free to IWOC members and \$15 to nonmembers.

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. In June and 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**

Independent Writers of Chicago

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN / HARRY KARABEL

# Here Comes Summer!

Do you remember the last day of school? When I think about it, I always think about the last day at Sawyer Elementary School, always a hot sunny day late in June. The Catholic kids in the neighborhood that attended St. Gall school at 55th and Kedzie had been out of school for two weeks.

Their summer routine was already in place. They were already wearing shorts and riding bikes and playing softball or soldiers or swapping comic books or going to the movies. I knew because just about every kid on my block went to St. Gall. After they got out of school, but before I did, they would sometimes taunt me on my way home, as mean and good-naturedly as grade school kids can be. But I was a Protestant kid, and St. Gall wasn't an option. At least I didn't have to go to confession. I only had a vague notion of what that was, but I could tell none of them liked it.

These were the guys I would hang with all summer because they lived closer to me. They were my block buddies (as in city block). And despite the occasional taunts, I couldn't wait for that summer to begin, to hang with these guys every day, find the best thing to do every day, get into some trouble we could get away with, pitch tents in back yards and stay up all night talking. My block buddies liked me. I was the good student, a good influence. Their moms liked for them to hang with me because my timidity saved us all from getting into any serious trouble.

So as I walked home on

that sunny day in June, I thought about those guys. I thought about my school pants that I wouldn't have to wear for a couple of months, except to church. They were uncomfortable as I recall, but worse than that: I was not supposed to get them dirty or wear them down in any way. One small slip in the playground from having too much fun running on the gravel could tear a hole in those precious trousers, and there would be some kind of hell to pay for that. But all summer, I didn't have to worry about my clothes. They could get dirty. They could get torn. With "play clothes" anything goes.

But I also thought about what I was leaving behind. I liked school. I was good at school and not so good at softball or any other sport. My school buddies were the Brainiac Geek Squad (as I have lovingly called them before), all of us saved from being total social pariahs only by our brains. Our brains didn't stop us from being dorks, but they gave us our identity and an occasional glimmer of cool. I was walking away from that for a couple of months. And even though I was walking into a summer of relatively unstructured freedom, of new experiences, I always felt a little, lonely pang for what I was leaving behind.

That's kind of how I feel about leaving our meeting space for the last few years, the Chicago Athletic Association. From their website: "The CAA was founded in 1890 by Marshall Field, A.G. Spalding, Cyrus McCormick, and Henry Ives Cobb, among oth-



ers. The original Articles of Association of the Club state that these men founded the CAA "to encourage all sports, to promote physical culture, and to cultivate social intercourse and friendly relations among the members of the Association." The building was designed by renowned Chicago architect and founding member Henry Ives Cobb. Since its completion in the summer of 1893, this 11-story structure has been considered an architectural masterpiece.

I'm not sure a group of the hardest-working writers in Chicagoland were exactly what Marshall Field and the others had in mind for their building space. But we could not have asked for better accommodations. The Lakeshore Room on the seventh floor offered probably the best view of Millennium Park in the city. The catering was a welcome change from supplying our own cookies, and the building and the space nicely complemented our band of wordsmiths.

Ellen Krupp, your Board's hard-working secretary, brought us to this sweetheart deal of a place. She made it happen with a couple of phone calls and, frankly, we could not believe our good fortune. Thank you, Ellen.

It is always a sad moment when the future crushes the life out of the past, and that is what is happening with the Chicago Athletic Association. The building is going condo and we had to vacate the premises. Joel Kinman and Roger Rueff agreed to hunt down a new

*Continued on page 4.*

# Gregorich Hones Research Skills in Tailing Charlie Chan's Creator

BY KATIE VALENTINO



Researching and writing for biographies can be an incredibly rewarding, fun, and challenging experience. Our May speaker, Barbara Gregorich, has had a wide range of experiences while researching some her of works which include a biography of Earl Derr Biggers, who created the detective character Charlie Chan, and her better known book, *Women at Play: The Story of Women in Baseball* (Harcourt, 1993). Gregorich has crossed many genres from biographies to mystery writing to *Waltur Buys a Pig in a Poke*, a compilation of children's stories.

Our energetic, versatile, and creative speaker entertained members with a two-part presentation. The first part focused on Earl Derr Biggers biography. The second part opened up to questions about researching, writing, interviewing, and where to find inspiration.

How did Gregorich decide to begin to research Earl Derr Biggers? After several articles about women in sports, she proposed writing an article about Biggers to the editors at *Timeline*, a quarterly magazine of history and culture. There were three prompts for Gregorich to write about Biggers: she grew up near Biggers hometown; only a few people knew about Biggers; and even fewer people knew that the Charlie Chan as depicted by Biggers was not the same as the character portrayed in most of the movies.

Gregorich had been famil-

iar with Biggers writings for most of her life as Biggers was born near Gregorich's hometown in Ohio.

Gregorich first read the six Charlie Chan novels when she was in high school, then ten years after her first read, and again many years later.

Biggers' life is a great example of how apparent setbacks can lead to unforeseen fortunes. Biggers began writing his first novel, *The Seven Keys to Baldpate* after being fired from his position as a drama critic at the *Boston Traveler*. This and his second novel, *Love Insurance*, were made into plays.

Biggers became physically exhausted working in theater and took time off in Hawaii. This trip to Hawaii led to the creation of his most famous character, Charlie Chan.

Gregorich shared some of the difficulties in researching Biggers' life. These difficulties included learning that one library had burned all of its historical photos and that Biggers' requested that his correspondence and notes be destroyed upon his death. Undaunted, Gregorich tracked newspaper articles from Warren, Ohio, newspapers which followed Biggers' career and featured articles about him when he came back to his hometown.

Through those articles, Gregorich learned where Biggers later lived, which led her to inquire of libraries near his residences about letters or articles related to him. Despite intense investigation, Gregorich was unable to ascertain who cur-

rently holds the copyright to Biggers' works.

As the Biggers biography research indicates, there are often many avenues that need to be explored when digging for information. One location, one article, one person may lead to several other directions to explore.

When it comes to interviewing techniques, Gregorich makes sure she knows her subject before making her initial call. She also ensures she has many open-ended questions to open the interviewee up. This can lead to some difficulty, as some interviewees tend to ramble. Gregorich pointed out the importance of politely cutting the person off or redirecting him or her back to the original question.

When Gregorich interviewed old-time players for her book on women in baseball, she limited her calls to 30 minutes to avoid tiring these elderly women. This led to some incomplete interviews, but Gregorich wanted to respect the physical limitations of her subjects. Gregorich also found that many people were very excited to talk about the past and about family members whom no one had mentioned in decades.

Gregorich believes that experience and hundreds of interviews have given her the ability to just ask questions, try to get information, and not be afraid to redirect the interview back to the original task. Gregorich admits that it can be very uncomfortable stopping

an interviewee from racing down a million tangents, but is a necessary part of the process. She points out it is respectful to the interviewee in the sense that she keeps the interview within the allotted time.

Gregorich definitely chose to write about some of the things she loves the most. She always loved baseball, hence the interest in women in baseball. She loved mysteries and local authors, leading to research on Biggers and writing her own mystery. But she has also remained versatile and written for children and in the educational field.

To learn more about our guest, visit her website at [barbaragregorich.com](http://barbaragregorich.com).

IWOC Welcomes  
New Members

Michele Acosta  
Mary Kelly  
Marc Pressley  
Jason Vetrano

IWOC RENEWALS

Rejoin June 11-13

Still Get 3 Extra Free  
Categories for a total of 8

Use PayPal  
Or Send a Check

We apologize for the  
problems caused by our  
ISP's moving us to a new  
server, but you reap the  
benefits: a membership  
extension. Rejoin NOW!

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## Here Comes Summer! *Continued from page 2.*

haunt for us. We needed a space that would complement our endeavors, one that allowed us to mingle as well as listen to a speaker. We wanted easy access to transportation. We wanted good catering. After endless phone calls and site visits, they found a great location right down the street. (Richard Eastline suggested the site to us – Editor.)

Starting on June 12, the Independent Writers of Chicago will be meeting at National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan, across from the Art Institute, on the corner of Michigan and Adams. We will meet in the auditorium — Room 5006 — on the fifth floor this month.

School's out. Summer is in. And your block buddies want to see you. If you haven't been to a meeting in a while, make this one a priority. So put on your play clothes and help us start a new tradition in a new place. It's a no-brainer for me. After a month away, I miss my block buddies. Since the new place is just down the street from the old place, I'll park in the same place. That means I'll have to walk by the CAA building. But I am going to resist every urge to peer in the front door. Sometimes you're better off staying in the moment and leaving the past behind. ♡

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## Would You Like an IWOC Online Discussion List?

BY RUTH E. THALER-CARTER

**A**s a new, out-of-state member of IWOC, I would enjoy getting acquainted with members electronically. Several of my other professional associations provide electronic discussion lists to their members that are interactive, lively versions of IWOC's bulletin-board or forum service. These discussion lists are a great way for members to exchange tips, questions, advice, problems and the occasional chit-chat as we deal with the daily challenges and rewards of freelancing.

Electronic discussion lists, for those who haven't participated in such things yet, involve setting up a group membership through something like YahooGroups.com; it's a free service, usually administered and/or moderated by an owner or a couple people sharing ownership responsibilities. Once the group is in place, members can send messages asking for advice or sharing triumphs, and other members chime in.

People can choose to receive a list in digest mode, where they get batches of messages at a time that arrive once or twice a day (some lists are so busy that they generate 10 digests a day with 10 or 20 messages each!), or as individual messages that arrive as soon as someone writes in.

We'd like to know whether IWOC members would be interested in having this type of discussion list. If so, in late June, we will try our hand at setting one up. Let us know what you think at [ruth@writerruth.com](mailto:ruth@writerruth.com) or [webmaster@iwoc.org](mailto:webmaster@iwoc.org). I look forward to meeting fellow IWOC members online! ♡

*Editor's Note: Please give us your feedback on this. We want to bring members new benefits. If you'll use it, we'll do it.*

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## Calendar

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### June 12

**IWOC Monthly Meeting** (rescheduled February program). Word maven Erin McKean will introduce us to little known reference works and we'll have fun with some unusual words. Visitors welcome. National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan, Chicago. Networking at 5 p.m., program at 6.

### 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. Save the date.

### 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.

*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 5 (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.

### June 28 (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.

## It's Happening on the Web!

Check Out Writers' Line

Browse Resources

See What's Doing in IWOC Events

**WWW.IWOC.ORG**