



Stet

Independent Writers of Chicago

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FREE PARKING, FREE APPETIZERS AT OCTOBER 9 IWOC MIXER

Food and Fun With ACP

If you are looking for a way to celebrate Leif Erikson (or Ericson) Day on Tuesday, Oct. 9, come to the IWOC and Alliance of Creative Professionals (ACP) mixer, 5:00 to 7:30 p.m. at Marcello's Restaurant, 645 W. North Ave., Chicago, (one block west of Halsted). The mixer takes the place of the regular October IWOC meeting.

Poor Leif, the Norseman never got proper credit for bringing the first Europeans to America 500 years before Columbus. It wasn't until 1964 that Congress and President Lyndon Johnson declared a day in observance of Leif's feat of rowing Viking longboats all the way to America. He's also memorialized locally by a statue in Humboldt Park.

There were few if any freelance writers during Erikson's time which surely accounts for the lack of publicity. Social media of the day was confined to runestones which resembled grave-stones. Short tributes, similar to text messages, were written right to left

on the stones. If the Viking publicist left a runestone in Newfoundland to record Leif's triumph, we are still looking for it.



In truth, we don't need an excuse to get together for fun and networking, and we are especially excited that members of the Alliance of Creative Professionals (ACP) will join us. ACP is a relatively new, broad-based group of content providers. Its members include artists, architects, web and graphic designers/ developers, marketing pros, photographers, entertainers, musicians, composers, and writers.

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News About IWOCers

Recession or no, IWOCers have been busy doing great things lately. Our webmaster, Roger Rueff, has written a book, *Discovering the Soul of Your Story*, which sets forth various techniques for story creation and development. There's a website too (www.soulofyourstory.org), which is "a global community of storytellers whose members are committed to honing their skills and to helping each other in the process."

Member Dennis Byrne has also been up to bookish things. His new book, *Madness: The War of 1812*, is a timely novel—this is the bicentennial of that war—that one reviewer says "takes us back to a time we should know better. It is a choice yarn of war and intrigue." There's a website for this as well: www.madness1812.com.

Jeff Steele and Jennifer Oatfield are launching the first of a series of library-based IWOC outreach events—a seminar on opportunities in freelance writing plus a plug for IWOC—at the Eisenhower Library, 4613 N. Oketo, in Harwood Heights, on Tuesday, October 23, 7-8:30 p.m. Other IWOCers are invited to join them and/or promo the event. ■

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/DAVE EPSTEIN

Swords, Plowshares, and Prairies



The dawn breeze was crisp and bracing. Gauzy clouds played tag across a sun-washed sky. This was perfect for a rustic ramble at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie along trails glowing with fall colors, breathing pure country air.

So why were we standing on a white gravel road, looking at a dark gray 12-foot-high penitentiary-style chain link fence two hundred yards ahead?

The earlier arrivals said they could not find a trail or a map marker. Acting as Dan'l Boone, wilderness explorer, I set off for the fence. My shoes kicked up puffs of white grit from the road. A dusty white pickup with the name of a construction firm on the door was parked beside a large open gate. A woman wearing a yellow helmet was behind the wheel looking down, maybe at a book—or more likely, a tablet computer or smartphone. She seemed disinclined to conversation. Anyway, it was not fitting for Dan'l Boone, frontier scout, to ask for directions.

A few yards ahead, two wooden posts supported the kind of plaque on which trail maps are often printed in forest preserves. When I got there, the posts were sturdy and set in concrete, and the plaque was some heavy-gauge, apparently rust-resistant, burnished bronze-looking metal. It said, "United States Forest Service"—and nothing else. As a patriotic citizen and taxpayer, I was proud of the high-quality construction work by my government, but I did wish the sign offered more information.

The marl road continued north, and another gravel trail led east into what looked like prairie. As I tried to decide

which route to take, a rural-looking young man dressed in camos came loping down the road with a potent-looking crossbow over his shoulder. About ten yards behind came a grizzled older man, also wearing camos. He had a large gray walrus mustache, a hunting bow with complicated pulleys, and a quiver with vivid red-fletched arrows on his back. Well, if I was Dan'l Boone on the frontier, the bows and arrows fit right in.

Then I heard a truck engine rumbling. A large semi hauling a grimy open-topped trailer appeared, trailing billows of white marl dust. I held my breath, trying to avoid swallowing dust, then saw my fellow-walkers coming toward me, just as they too were engulfed in white grit.

Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, 60 miles southwest of the Loop and just south of Joliet, is the first national tallgrass prairie (restoration) in the US. A member of our walking group had mentioned wonderful walking trails where we could see many native prairie wildflowers and birds and enjoy the oaks and ash and prairie grasses turning to the golden hues of autumn. She regretted being unable to come this particular morning.

Midewin is also on the site of the US Army's former Joliet Arsenal. (I think our friend sold real estate in another life.)

After the truck's dust settled, one of our fellow-walkers said the young bow-hunter had told her we would find the trailhead if we walked a bit further along the gravel road and looked "for some sticks on the left." About a hundred yards further on we found two low fences of woven branches

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Swords, Plowshares, and Prairies

Continued from page 2.

that formed a rustic gateway leading into a grassy path.

The path skirted the edge of a large restored prairie area, about a mile across. The grasses, some six feet tall, glowed in the sun with all the rusty reds and golds and browns and soft gray feathery plumes of autumn. The trail led into the woods, where the trees were drowning in thick undergrowth of tangled bushes and wildflowers. We saw some burr oaks that were 10-15 feet in diameter and looked to be at least 150 years old. Their lower branches looked like black, twisted claws.

Forest Service signs at intervals beside the trail did provide information, although some were hard to read from weathering. The signs (supplemented by research after our walk) explained that this area of about 40,000 acres had been farmed by some of the earliest pioneers in Illinois, who sod-busted the original prairie and plowed deep furrows that impacted roots and led to erosion. In 1940-41 the US Army bought the land and cleared about 450 small farms to set up the Joliet Arsenal, which was used through World War II and later reactivated during the Korean and Viet Nam Wars.



Joliet Arsenal Bunker

There were two—prudently separated—plants. Even so, in June 1942, in the same week as the Battle of Midway, an explosion felt up to 100 miles away left over 50 workmen dead or

missing. In World War II, according to the website GlobalSecurity.org, one plant loaded nearly a billion bombs, shells, and other munitions, while the other plant produced over one billion pounds of TNT. The arsenal was largely decommissioned in the late 1970s but sent out its final munitions shipment on June 23, 1993, according to the *Chicago Tribune*.

As army activity declined, the land turned to scrub. Invasive shrubs and trees, such as osage orange (originally planted by farmers as hedgerows) and hawthorn choked out small native plants, killed the lower limbs of old trees like the burr oaks by shutting out sunlight, and damaged wetlands and bird habitats.

In 1996 nearly 20,000 acres were set aside to create the Midewin Prairie restoration. So much toxic residue remained from manufacturing explosives that it was 2004 before the first 5,000 acres were safe for public access. A woman who worked at the arsenal from 1942-1944 was interviewed in 2010 for the *Will County News* blog and reported that working with a chemical called tetral sent her to St. Joseph's Hospital in Joliet for two months. All her skin peeled off, her hair fell out, and her teeth turned gray. She also recalled that many creeks in the area ran red with TNT residue (see Ann Baskerville, willcountynews.blogspot.com/2010/04/oral-history-of-joliet-arsenal.html).

The Midewin Prairie website says "the Army cleanup is now complete and

7,200 acres of Midewin and 22 miles of trails are open to the public for non-motorized recreation," but Midewin remains a "prairie under construction."

The six of us walked about two miles, pausing to identify wildflowers and birds and enjoy a small oxbow lake,



Buttonbush Lake

shrunk from the drought and thickly carpeted with gleaming green algae. At the end, we walked about a mile back along the gravel road, pausing at the roadside as more large trucks rumbled past, the drivers slowing down and pulling over very considerably to avoid choking us with dust. We waved thanks, and they waved back. Back at the parking lot I asked a woman, who was cutting out invasive shrubs, about the arsenal and specifically the trucks that had passed us. She said they were hauling away rubble from the "deconstruction" of remaining ammunition bunkers, which had been huge concrete barrels buried in earth.

Midewin is truly beautiful and we will return to explore further. It's fascinating that some very solid remnants of World War II linger even seven decades later, but that natural beauty is being rescued from the ruins. Our walk also revealed that under every bush in our landscape a story may be lurking—or a bomb. ■

Did you know...



Some grammar tips to keep you usage-happy.

The abbreviation e.g. versus i.e.—Both of these are Latin abbreviations. The abbreviation e.g. stands for *exempli gratia* which means “for example,” and i.e. stands for *id est*, which means “that is.” Don’t worry about that though. Grammar Girl Mignon Fogarty suggests this simple trick for knowing which to use: The abbreviation i.e. begins with “i” so that should mentally trigger “in other words” or “in essence.” By the same token, e.g. begins with “e” which triggers “example” or “egg sample” for the more auditory-cued. Neither term needs italics and most style guides prefer a comma following the term.

En dash versus Em dash—You can keep these punctuation marks straight by remembering that an em dash is longer, as long as the typeset “M,” and the en dash is as long as the letter “N.” An em dash is used to indicate that something dramatic is about to be stated. For example: The police found the body—mutilated and decomposed—in the abandoned warehouse. The shorter en dash is used much less frequently, according to Grammar Girl Fogarty, usually only to indicate a range of numbers. For example: “I will be out of the office from December 4–December 15.” Most style guides prefer no spaces around either type of dash. ■

— Katherine Mikkelsen

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1.

October Mixer: Food and Fun With ACP

ACP and IWOC share an important philosophy that creative content providers should be paid commensurate with their value to the client. “The challenge (for creatives) always will be to create value for the thing that doesn’t exist yet—creating value not for the product but the person delivering it. Clients are not buying a thing; they are buying a process,” said Jon Schickedanz, president and a founder of ACP.

Your IWOC dues cover the small charge for this mixer. Non-members pay a \$10 non-member fee, (No first-time visitor discount for this one. Sorry.) ACP members will register for

the mixer in the same way they do for other ACP events. IWOC and ACP will start you off with tasty appetizers, including veggie choices. After that, you are on your own. Marcello’s has a full-service bar and serves Pepsi products. Its dinner menu features pizza and garlic broasted chicken. The restaurant provides **free** parking, and public transportation is nearby.

Remember, it is important that you register in advance so we know how much food to order. Don’t miss this opportunity to meet and visit with fellow creatives. You never know what collaborative ventures or worthwhile tips and leads you might pick up. ■

— Stewart Truelsen

SEPTEMBER MEETING REPRIS: THE ROUNDTABLES

IWOCers Share Experience

There were four distinct groups at the Roundtables, and your editor witlessly failed to provide a format for the four reporters who wrote up their groups. Consequently, some named names while others did not. Said editor apologizes for the lapse.

Group Moderator: Karen Schwartz. **Group Members:** Adam Smit, Jeff Steele, Dave Epstein, Carol Anderson, and Laura Stigler.

Question 1: “I just got stiffed by a client. Why does this happen to me?”

Dave Epstein: A contract must be signed by both parties to be valid.

Laura Stigler: A lot of it is goodwill. I had a problem with a dance company; I wrote her [the client] a letter and she paid me soon after that.

Jeff Steele: I rarely get stiffed; the last time was in the 1990s.

Question 2: “I want to market my services on the Internet. Is it worth it?”

Adam Smit: Social media is only one of many tools to use to market your services.

Dave Epstein: It’s a visibility thing.

Question 3: “I’ve signed on to do a fairly big project at a flat rate only to find that my client neglected to tell me absolutely everything that is expected of me. It looks like I’m going to take a bath on this one. How can I avoid this in the future?”

Jeff Steele: You can offer a set project range to your client.

Dave Epstein: It’s very important for me to know my productivity in terms of tasks and in terms of writing and editing. ■

— Karen Schwartz

Recap continued on page 5.

IWOC Roundtables (Continued from page 4.)

Group Moderator: Jane Jerrard. **Group Members:** Nancy Solomon, Richard Eastline, Catherine Rategan, Phil Zack, and Jim Kepler (briefly).

Question 1: "I work at home. My kids, my dog, my spouse/partner/roommate are constantly interrupting me or making noise in the background when I'm on the phone with clients. And it seems every time I'm on a particularly important call I get a call-waiting beep from my mother. How can I project a more professional image? I certainly don't want to go to any big expense."

Comments: It's always important to keep a separate space in your home to work. This separation allows you to eliminate distraction. Your spouse, roommates, and especially children need to know that when you work, this is your place of work; this is your office. They need to know that you need to be treated with the courtesies that anyone is afforded in the workplace. You need to keep a professional image. You (should) let clients know that if you are unavailable for personal reasons, you are currently at "meetings," and not running errands, going to the grocery, etc.



Question 2: "I joined IWOC eight months ago, and I haven't landed a single job yet as a result of my membership. I've even attended a couple of programs. I'm wondering whether I should renew this fall. What do you think?"

Comments: It begs the question— have you applied yourself? Jobs are not guaranteed; this is more of a support group, a place to find advice and network, especially with writers in all different fields (medical writers, technical writers, etc.). Keep at it—learn new skills outside your area of expertise, try different writing markets.

I did not get a job for quite a while after joining IWOC, but I kept at it, and I have made it my profes-

sion for a long time.

Question 3: "I find it really hard to discuss money with clients. When they ask what I charge, I stumble around and it's worth?" somehow or other assignment, I find that I'm not say something like, "What's your budget?" or "What do you think we kind of settle on a price, but then when I get deep into the doing much better than breaking even. What's an easy way to control the question and get a decent rate?"

Comments: Modest changes in rates are better for old clients. With new clients, you should feel it out, it's often a gut nego- tiation. You should suggest rates since you have knowledge of the business. This is a place where IWOC can help.

Does the client actually know your hourly rate? Project rates can be raised from your normal hourly rate, as you and the client determine the actual results needed from your service. Never ask what your work is worth, but rather (to the client), "What are you trying to accomplish?" The price of your work should be for the writing, and small adjustments! If the client wants to come back and change most of what you did for them, why did they hire you in the first place?

Always try to do contracts (or creative briefs) in written form. You also should not make any guarantees that cannot be kept. ■

— Phil Zack

Recap continued on page 7.





Image courtesy of Silver Dragon Studio, www.silverdragonstudio.com.

Pinning Down Proposal Writing

Writing proposals is a daunting prospect, but there are plenty of sites on the web that aim to help. We got the info for the piece below from Marketing Mentor (marketingmentor.com). There are sites for every kind of proposal: government, nonprofit, academic, and more. There are templates galore (which is amusing since most advice puts the kibosh on “canned” proposals) and even several kinds of software that purport to knock out your proposal in the blink of an eye.

Almost all the sites offer some, often very useful, free advice, but I haven’t seen one yet that wasn’t selling something too. A few are half-baked drivel, but those are easy to spot. ■

— The editor

PRE-PROPOSAL CHECKLIST: IT’S ALL IN THE DETAILS

Ten Things You Need to Know to Beat the Competition

If you want the Golden Prosperity Dragon to grab you by the claw and drag you down the road to clients with big-ticket projects, inevitably somewhere along the way, you’ll have to write a full-blown proposal. Most of us regard writing a proposal complete with budget and lots of ancillary details with as much enthusiasm as getting a knee replacement. But a complicated project generally pays well . . . if we get it.

Ask the client the questions on this checklist to get the critical info you need to write a strong proposal and win the job:

1 The Goals: What are the top-priority goals of the project? What specific objectives do you need to achieve? How does the project fit into your overall business scheme? How will you measure the success of the project?

2 The Market: Who is the market for this project? Is research available on this market? Have you approached this market before?

3 The Content: Where will the content come from? If you, is it ready? Will I need to do research? Are there sources you do/don’t want used? What specific deliverables do you expect from me, e.g., just brochure copy or layout and design too?

4 The Timeframe: Do you have a hard deadline? Is this a rush? How quickly can I expect feedback? What other time factors apply?

5 The Contact: To whom will I report overall? Are there other informational contacts?

6 The Decision-Making Process: Who is the main decision-maker on the project? Is it one person, a committee, or a series of people who sign off in turn?

7 The Budget: What is your overall budget for the project? Are there specific allocations for certain items, e.g., printing? Am I expected to provide an itemized budget in my proposal or will you prepare that?

8 The Proposal: What specific items do you want included in the proposal?

9 Other Vendors: Are you asking for bids from other vendors? If so, will I have an opportunity to rebid if not initially selected?

10 The Presentation: What is the deadline for the proposal? Will I be presenting this in person as well as in writing? If so, to whom?

This may seem like too much detail, but better to ask upfront rather than omit something important. ■

— Joen Kinnan

More IWOC Roundtables *(Continued from page 5.)*

Group Moderator: James Hodl. **Group Members:** Chuck Coffin, Craig Olson, Diana Schneidman, James Walsh, and Jim Kepler (briefly).

Question 1: “Recently I interviewed with a large not-for-profit association located in the heart of the Magnificent Mile. I want very much to work for them. It’s a prestige credit for my resume. I believe in their cause. The office is easy to get to, and I like the people I spoke to. The problem is, when I raised the issue of payment, I was told they could pay only about one-third my normal rate because, ‘We’re a not-for-profit charitable association.’ What should I do?”

Chuck Coffin: It depends on how much prestige comes from writing for the group. If it is very prestigious, I’d be glad they paid something. If not, they should pay what my work is worth. **Jim Kepler:** I’d ask them if being a not-for-profit charitable group gets them a discount on their rent; from AT&T; from ComEd. If not, why should you give them a discount? Insist on getting paid for what your work is worth.

Question 2: “I had a call on Friday afternoon from a client who was in a panic. She had to have a job done by Monday and was willing to pay ‘overtime’ if I’d bail her out. I put aside everything else and canceled my trip to Peoria, worked until dawn, e-mailed the job, and invoice to her on deadline, then crashed most of the day Monday. After three months, she says she cannot approve my invoice because it’s more than she usually pays me. She dodges the promise of ‘overtime’ pay but wants to give me another assignment next week. What should I do?”

Craig Olson: I’d tell her to settle old claims first before you do another assignment. If she won’t settle, there is always Small Claims Court. In the future with premium rush assignments, get terms in writing and/or get partial payment up front.

James Hodl: Show up with the project on time, but don’t let go until you get payment.”

Question 3: “I’d like to try marketing my services on the Internet —Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc. —but I don’t have the vaguest idea about how to go about it. Has anyone tried this? How much does it cost?”

Diana Schneidman: I hardly use Facebook. I hate Facebook. LinkedIn is better. I’m 47 groups but have never gotten an assignment from anyone. I even took out a \$50 ad that, months later, has not clicked. The fallacy of online networking, I believe, is that the do the hiring are too busy to do social media. I’ve had much better luck cold calling. You get a job right away, but if you persist you will. Overall, knowing somebody who knows trumps social media. **Craig Olson:** With Twitter, you can make a compelling case for When you link with people who need writers, you can provide links so they can read your stuff online. To boost your chances of getting attention and possibly assignments, you have to be provocative without telling too much about yourself.



linked to on LinkedIn people who may not somebody hiring you.

Question 4: “I love the work that I do. It’s highly specialized, and I can make full use of all my education and training. The problem is that because it’s such a narrow field there are very few assignments available. I already know just about everybody who hires in my area of expertise. How can I find enough work to keep myself in business?”

Diana Schneidman: Expand your area of expertise by seeking assignments that are just slightly outside your current area. Knowledge builds on knowledge. **James Hodl:** By all means expand into parallel markets and not necessarily the obvious ones. I started out writing about the appliance aftermarket but expanded first into other home product areas, then these products’ retailing, and into restaurant equipment. One of the parallel markets led to my writing about the technical aspects of slot machines and other gaming equipment, which for years provided me the most work and pay days.

Question 5: “While doing work in a client’s office, I learned some information that could be extremely damaging to my client, both personally and professionally. I don’t think he knows anything about what’s being said. Should I tell him what I’ve heard? Should I confront the persons in the office involved in the situation and tell them what I know about what’s going on? Or should I simply keep my mouth shut? If my client gets hurt and finds out I knew about these conversations, might he think I am disloyal or worse?”

James Walsh: “Stay out of it! You’re only hearing one side of the story!” ■

— James Hodl

Recap continued on page 8.

Guess What? The Last Roundtable!

Continued from page 7.

Group Moderator: Joen Kinnan. **Group Members:** Jennifer Lyng Rueff, Roger Rueff, Ann Kepler, Barb Dillard, and David Steinkraus.

Question 1: "I'd like to do more promoting, but I don't know where to start. How can I get my name out without destroying my bank account?"

Comments: Try social media such as LinkedIn and Twitter. Link to other writers and people in companies, and join LinkedIn writing groups. Same goes for Twitter: Follow people in companies you want to write for. There are tip sheets about how to use LinkedIn and Twitter, and you can find them through Internet searches.

Put keywords in your website so it appears in searches. You may say simply, "looking for new business." What about responding to Craigslist ads? Consensus, no.

Many people have found Roger [Editor's note: and many other IWOCers] through the IWOC writers' list. Also, consider writing for *Stet*, which will give you some clips and publicize your name. Another thought: establish yourself as an expert by blogging.

Question 2: "One of my clients seems to find fault with every project I do for her. The company pays well and on time and has reasonable deadlines, but the nitpicking is getting to me. Yet she calls me because I know the product line and marketing approach. Should I drop her entirely?"

Comments: First recognize that the client is not suffering any consequence for being a pain. You can take the work and suck it up. Alternatively, can you charge a higher fee just for the aggravation of dealing with this person? You will either make more money, or the client will turn down your offer.

Question 3: "I've been doing public relations for an agency client, and by now I'm sure I know the client better than the agency does. I think the client is tiring of the agency's high fees and may soon jump ship. I'd like to continue working on my own for the client and could do so for a fraction of the cost. Should I approach the client discreetly?"

Comment: This is very dangerous ground both ethically and from a practical business frame of reference. Ethically you are undercutting the agency, and from a practical standpoint, poaching a client will ruin your reputation if the knowledge becomes public — and almost everything does. Comment: It would be ethically easier if the client approaches you. You could also approach the client's new agency and offer to do the client's work for them, but this depends on whether your contract with the present agency allows you to work for another. So the first step is to read your contract.

Question 4: "When you're done with a project, who owns the final files? The situation is this: The company did some work to publish a book for a client, and this required modifying the client's text files for publication. Our lawyer says we own the modifications but not the client's content."

Group Consensus: The company owns the files for the book. The client is not asking for the return of content he already owns. He also wants the value that the company added to prepare the book, and he should pay for that.

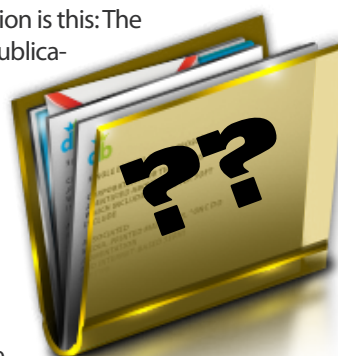
Question 5: "Some of my clients ask what my hourly rate is, others want to know I'm uncomfortable because people will question [work] phases and try to talk me down or eliminate sections. Suggestions?"

Comments: You may calculate a daily or weekly rate, but don't tell the client. Quote a range with a high and low and then bill a middle amount which is what you want to must be on site for a day, be sure to include a day rate for that. If the client asks about you don't know enough about the project to estimate that.

When you are calculating, also bear in mind what you may know about the client. If there are likely to be multiple drafts, either include [provisions for] that in the contract (although seeing such a provision may encourage people to ask for multiple drafts) or calculate your fee based on that assumption. If the client changes the scope of the project, you should be paid for a completely new project. Include a clause in the contract specifying that, if the scope of the project changes, the fee is subject to renegotiation.

Question 6: "We're trying to assemble a digital services consortium. How do we protect our creative process?"

Group Consensus: If there is nothing special, new, or unique about the process it probably cannot be copyrighted. Clients may ask for an outline of the creative process as part of the bid with the intent of getting that value without paying. Refuse. Tell them that's really part of the general writing process. ■



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— David Steinkraus

