



**International Science Writers
Association**

News.ISWA

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ISWA's (New) President's Letter — Extending a Hand of Friendship



Pallava Bagla

Science is flourishing, so science writing and communicating should, too, but in many parts of the world, science writers are slowly being edged out. It is exactly in such times that one needs friends who help tide over the troughs.

The International Science Writers Association (ISWA) extends its hands of friendship across borders and continents to all people who love to tell stories based on science. ISWA, the world's oldest international organisation for individual science writers, is now 49 years young. It was set up in 1967 with the first President being John Maddox, the legendary editor of *Nature* magazine. ISWA members in the past have always extended a helping hand to our fraternity whenever a fellow member sought help. Today the same spirit will hopefully continue, as veteran and able past President of ISWA James Cornell often says, "Even in times of 'Facebook,' nothing can beat a face-to-face meeting."

There is new blood which has been infused into the leadership team of ISWA; Jim Cornell passed the baton to me after a vote of members at the Helsinki WFSJ meeting, and I hope to live up to the high expectations and standards of the organisation that he established. Today among the office bearers we have representatives from five continents, all doing work on a pro-bono basis to ensure that the future of international science writing remains bright.

ISWA has made a debut on Facebook, so do look for it and become Friends; it is open to all science writers, not just members of ISWA. The website has also been revamped through the untiring efforts of our colleague Mr. Sedeer el-Showk, and the newsletter is also getting perked up with Dr. Larry Krumenaker, giving it a fresh look. If you have personal stories to share about exciting assignments, do reach out to Larry; he is always hungry for stories on the science of science writing.

ISWA remains that organisation which offers a person-to-person contact as its hallmark. In this age where we only 'like' friends as on Facebook, and have, in a way, stopped 'making' friends in the real world, ISWA offers real opportunities to exchange ideas, build bonds with science writers from near and far. For example, the upcoming annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) to be held in Washington DC, USA from February 11-15, 2016, with its apt theme 'Global Science Engagement' offers a lovely watering hole for meeting old friends, and occasionally helping younger reporters find anchorage in the vast ocean of science that any AAAS meeting offers. See Jim Cornell's article on Page 7. Look for a possible get together event for all ISWA members who participate in the AAAS meeting.

All suggestions on how to strengthen ISWA and make it more relevant and vibrant are welcome. Feel free to reach any of us (our emails are on Page 6); we are here to serve the interests of the science writing community.

Pallava Bagla

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10 Commandments for Science Writers

Wolfgang C. Goede

There has never been more science, but alas, seemingly less money to earn with science writing. These ten commandments may help ISWA folks to produce more *relevant* content and *sell* it better.



- I. **Title:** Hey, what's your *goal*? Become clear right at the beginning into which direction you want to proceed; create an *intriguing* headline.
- II. **Homework:** Dig up facts and figures, not only from online resources, but also from your calling experts. Don't drown in an endless sea of research, but know to stop when you have enough. Don't cook up a stew. Go for Nouvelle Cuisine, i.e. one fancily decorated shrimp. Small is beautiful.
- III. **Synopsis:** Produce a one sheet summary of what your article is all about, its unique selling point (USP), which new knowledge you will reveal, which audiences are to be reached, and —important—how much you will invoice! This is your BLUE PRINT, for the piece and also for negotiations with the editors.
- IV. **Structure:** Break your article down into a series of subtitles. Think of them as a skeleton, onto which you put the flesh, your writing. Thus it becomes at least 50% easier.
- V. **Pro & Con:** Life consists of bright and dark sides. Find *critical* voices, and ask "Is there a dialogue with citizens about anticipated chances and risks?" If you skip this, you are not a journalist, but a cheerleader.
- VI. **Writing:** Keep it with Hemingway: short, crisp, carved out sentences. Don't get lost in complicated subclauses. Avoid any type of scientific slang, adhere to LIVELY writing, with red cheeks.
- VII. **Narrative:** This is the mother of all stories, which has given birth to the Bible, The Odyssey, fairy tales and science articles. There are heroes and antagonists, entangled in love and hate, ups and down. At the end of the drama, a lesson is to be learned. Yes, scientific research also has all these ingredients.
- VIII. **Practice Pitching:** Don't be a hermit, ask other people for *feedback*. Doubts about your story? Try the elevator pitch, or try it out in your usual drinking tavern? If you see eyes light up, you are in the game.
- IX. **Flow Forward:** We all love to procrastinate, so give yourself a firm schedule. Stick to it! If you get stuck, try mind maps or ferreting: Just start, sooner or later you will get to your essentials.

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News.ISWA is the newsletter, published irregularly, of the International Science Writers Association, now based in Delhi, India with its President. © 2016 by ISWA. Cover photos: Top—L. Calderón, Bottom—L. Krumenaker.

Summary of ISWA's Board Meeting—November 2015

Sedeer el-Showk

ISWA's international character remains at the fore as new leadership takes the reins and the organization find its place in the 21st century. Arranging a meeting of the secretariat involved coordinating across time zones ranging from Arizona to India,

but we benefited by drawing on members' experiences from nearly every continent.

In our November 2015 meeting, the secretariat considered how to manage ISWA's transition and revitalization. The discussion revolved around organizational issues and how ISWA can reconnect with its members and best serve their needs. Transferring control of ISWA's funds to the new treasurer raised questions about whether ISWA should change its legal status, perhaps to become a non-profit or an LLC. Changing our status might offer access to new options for funding, but it would involve additional organizational overhead and possibly increased costs. For the moment, we plan to do the minimum required to arrange our bank account, but our legal status is a subject we will revisit in the future.

We decided to use the transition and revitalization time period as an opportunity to revisit processes and organizational questions important to establishing a strong foundation for our future. The secretariat will review the constitution – last updated in 1987 – and will compose guidelines for members to commit to as a set of “best practices”. We will also consider how to streamline the application processes for new members, while establishing clear criteria to ensure that ISWA remains an organization of and for science writers.

ISWA recently created a group on Facebook and on LinkedIn, and we considered how to use these and other technologies to keep in touch with our members. In addition to using these groups for announcements, we will restart the ISWA newsletter under the auspices of new editor Dr. Larry Krumenaker and will establish a mailing list for discussion between members. A survey will be sent to our members and to the broader science-writing community to discover gaps that ISWA can fill and ways that we can help our members and the community. ✍️ **NI**

ISWA's Board Secretary and Webmaster Sedeer el-Showk blogs science from a farm in Morocco, and sometimes from a cabin in Finland.

(Continued from page 3)

- X. Rituals:** Find the right environment for your intellectual work, a library or coffeehouse or your own private office; stimulate yourself with classical music, rock, anything which makes your neurons rock, above all: REWARD yourself...but only when you are done!

I shouldn't have to say this, but experiment! Try out the entire digital tool box. Check into videos and story scrolling. You'll have plenty of challenges, but lots of fun, too! ✍️ **NI**

These 10 commandments are an homage to Gerhard Peter Moosleitner--founder of the popular science magazine, P.M. Magazine--who died at the age of 82. Moosleitner lived up to some of these commandments; the rest the author hopes he himself lives up to. Goede was P.M. editor for 29 years. This digest goes back to a workshop held last summer at the LMU University, Munich, http://www.sprach-und-literaturwissenschaften.uni-muenchen.de/studium/schreibzentrum/veranstaltungsarchiv/schreibtag_archiv/programm_20150731.pdf .

The InterAmerican Development Bank Promotes Hackathons in Science Journalism and Innovation

Lucy Calderón

For the second consecutive year, the InterAmerican Development Bank (IADB) organized a Hackathon in Science Journalism and Innovation for Latin America in order to promote science communication, technology and innovation in the region*. The main objective of this event is to learn and to address the challenges of communicating innovation through the generation of journalistic projects focused in productive innovation, social innovation, innovative entrepreneurship and culture of innovation. Both Hackathons have been carried out in Guadalajara, Mexico in early December, when there was still time to visit and take advantage of the International Book Fair of Guadalajara (FIL in Spanish), the second fair of its kind around the world, after the one in Frankfurt, Germany.

In 2014 the contest was launched to attract science journalists from all Latin America, but in its second, 2015 edition, it was only for Central American, Mexicans, and Dominican Republic journalists, designers, scientists, students, editors and science communicators. Participants whose main profession is computer systems and design are also invited so they can help journalists achieve their projects. For instance, they help with making a web page.

The activity combines a series of conferences with team work so the participants can develop projects or minimum solutions to the main goal: to improve science communication and innovation in the region. People present their ideas, then the attendees vote and choose the best six or eleven, depending on the number of attendees. The rest of the participants must decide they are going to support, and then they get together and work in groups. Those prototypes or solutions must be implemented in a short term and the best ideas receive financial support from the IADB and other stakeholders.

A Good Start

This initiative generated a very good response from people interested in science communication, studying or working in the field. It also nourished and built new friendships and networks among the participants.



Computer programmers and science writers in a Hackathon in Mexico cooperate, and compete, to create projects that will gain financial support in the science writing world.



Estrella Burgos from Mexico explains to participants the development of her team project that won the first edition of the Hackathon. All photos from the author.

make them real is very helpful and encouraging for their developers. Besides, they have a commitment with the IADB, so we are expecting to hear from them very soon. **NI**

Lucy Calderón, ISWA's Vice-President, covers Latin American ecology from Guatemala.

*This initiative was held also with the support of the Guadalajara University, the FIL, the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and Opinno, a global consulting innovation company.

The ISWA Board

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Member-at-Large/Board Member: Wolfgang Goede
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AAAS Annual Meeting—and Awards—Go Global

James Cornell

The 2016 annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), arguably the world's largest general science gathering, will be held in Washington, DC (USA), February 11-15. This year's theme is "Global Science Engagement," with an emphasis on how the world's scientific establishment can meet those challenges demanding both innovation and international cooperation.

Appropriately enough, for the first time in the 70-year history of the AAAS Science Journalism Awards program, entries were accepted from journalists around the globe in all award categories, including online journalism. The expansion was made possible by a generous doubling of the program endowment by The Kavli Foundation, sponsor of the awards since 2009. The new funds also permitted, for the first time, two awards in each of the eight categories -- a Gold Award (\$5,000) and a Silver Award (\$3,500).

Just under 40 percent of the 2015 awards went to international entries, comparable to the percentage of international entries received. Among the winners were reporters for the BBC, *Nature*, and France's *Le Monde*, Switzerland's *Neue Zurcher Zeitung* and the Danish Broadcasting Corporation. None of the awardees are ISWA members, but several may be known to our membership. The full list of winners can be seen at: <http://www.aaas.org/sja5201>.

"The new global era for the AAAS Kavli awards is off to a great start," said Rush Holt, AAAS chief executive officer. "The breadth of the winning work and the diversity of outlets in which it appeared demonstrate the vitality of science journalism at a time when public understanding of science is more important than ever. I expect the awards will prove to mean as much for international science writers as they have over the years for science writers in the United States."

Eat, Drink and Be Meeting

The prize winners will receive their awards at a reception to be held at the US National Zoo on Friday night, February 12, but that is not the only social and networking event for press registrants. These begin with a pre-meeting Press Breakfast Briefing, Thursday morning. A reception especially for International Reporters will be held that evening, beginning at 8 pm, after the AAAS opening lecture. Friday, there will be a Press Breakfast that morning hosted by the Institute for Basic Science, a midday luncheon featuring a moderated roundtable discussion with the 2015 Kavli Award winners, and the aforementioned Kavli Awards reception and ceremony that night.

The [Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres](#) will host a press breakfast Saturday, February 13, and the Nanyang Technological University will host a wine and cheese reception that afternoon. Later that evening, the D.C. Science Writers Association (DCSWA) will throw a party for newsroom registrants at the National Press Club. A final press breakfast will be held Sunday, February 14 (Valentine's Day!) and the AAAS news service, EurekaAlert!, will host a reception that same afternoon.

Brief-ly...

Of course, beyond the socializing and schmoozing, the AAAS serves up a grand smorgasbord of science, with literally hundreds of lectures, seminars, panel discussions, and poster sessions spread over five days and two locations. A daily schedule of news briefings exclusively for press attendees is intended to highlight the best and brightest and, presumably, most newsworthy of the multiple offerings.


In the international realm, for example, the AAAS says it has briefings planned on “the global response to the CRISPR gene-editing technique; an update on lessons from the Ebola outbreak, and the status of vaccine trials; use of forensics to combat illegal trafficking of ivory and other wildlife products; and the global risks of weather-driven food shocks.” A searchable meeting program is available at: <https://aaas.confex.com/aaas/2016/webprogram/>. For foreign reporters in particular, the AAAS provides a snapshot in time about the state and status of American science, especially hot-button policy issues. This may be even more true in an election year—with the meeting being held in the US national capital, headquarters for most federal science agencies and major pro-science lobbies.

A host of exhibitors set up stalls to demonstrate the latest in sci-tech publishing, communication, and gadgetry. The AAAS education and outreach team conducts lively, entertaining Family Days with hands-on demonstrations for kids—and great photo-ops for reporters.

Of Value To...

While the meeting theme may be “global challenges,” diligent and observant reporters willing to seek out opinions from attending scientists and policy-makers may gain some interesting insights on “domestic challenges,” particularly those that may shape the future of American science and technology.

Because of the eclectic and diverse nature of the meeting content, and the general interest in US S&T among foreign reporters, the AAAS pressroom usually includes many ISWA members. Several of the current officers have registered and hope to attend. Indeed, it is worthwhile registering, even if your chances of attending are slim. After all, registration is free for accredited media representatives and requires no commitment. ISWA membership is usually sufficient to obtain press credentials.

For more information about the meeting and the procedure for on-line registration, go to: <http://meetings.aaas.org/>. For questions about news operations or facilities available to foreign reporters, contact Gavin Stern, the AAAS’ new head of news and information (gstern@aaas.org). He replaces long-time news director—and ISWA friend—Earl Lane, who is now executive director of the aforementioned AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Awards. And, for anyone wishing more information about the Kavli Foundation, as well as its varied research interests and activities, you may get on the mailing list for the Kavli Newsletter by contacting the editor: Jim Cohen at cohen@kavlifoundation.org.  **NI**

Jim Cornell, former President of ISWA, monitors science resources, and small lizards, from his Arizona porch.

WANTED! STORIES!

**SOMETHING YOU DID? SOMETHING YOU LEARNED?
SEND TO EDITOR@INTERNATIONALSCEINCEWRITERS.ORG!**

American Science Writing Highlighted in NY Times Book Series

Generally considered the “gold standard” for American newspaper science journalism, *The New York Times* has collected some classic examples of its coverage in a series of anthologies, available from the paper’s on-line bookstore.

The descriptive titles are self-explanatory:

The New York Times Book of Science: More than 100 Years of Covering Science and Technology;

The New York Times Book of Physics and Astronomy: More Than 100 Years Covering the Expanding Universe; and

The New York Times Book of Medicine: More than 150 Years of Reporting on the Evolution of Medicine

The books can be ordered for US\$24.95 each from: <https://www.nytimes.com/store/books/health.html> --JC

The Difficulty of Publishing Science Articles in Iraqi Media

Harem Kakil

Within Iraq and the Kurdistan region it is difficult to see even one line in the newspaper or magazine of any scientific articles, because political articles are common in all the daily, weekly or monthly newspapers and magazines. In all aspects of life, publication policy is to discuss all the intellectual and clerical issues inside Iraq. And this is increasing exponentially, in reading and dissemination, in both Press and other publications.

Rarely, you see a possible dissemination of scientific article in all newspapers and monthly magazines, and the reasons are because of something the editor-in-chief hears from a political candidate or corporate body. Such liberation of science knowledge can only be written for publication and material benefit, and not take advantage of the concept of reading for self-education. Even scientific publishers in Iraq and the Kurdistan region changed their writing from scientific articles to political articles. One finds it rare to read scientific articles in the media and it is difficult to write scientific article to be published in a newspaper or magazines inside Iraq and Kurdistan. By my understanding, too, the level of reading in the minds of people within the community is also affected by the decline of scientific information published.

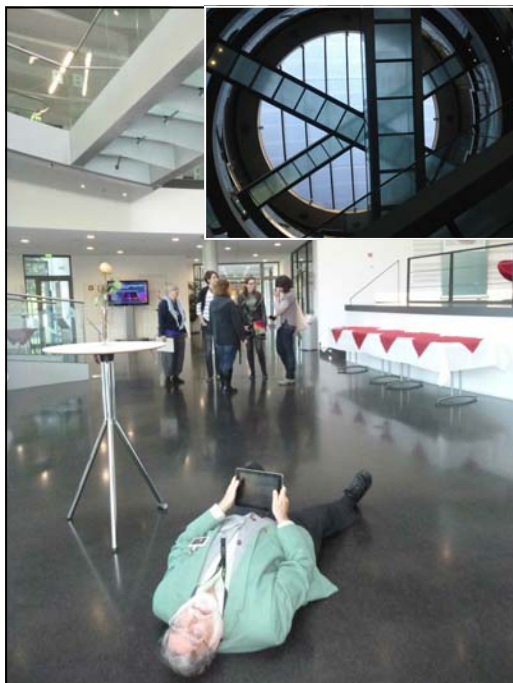
This situation in the region with scientific articles is that they have no importance, to the head of an inquiry body or editors in all newspapers and magazines in the country. **NI**

Harem Kakil, of Arbil, Iraqi, is an astronomy writer, ISWA member, and freelance editor, and a Kurdistan science radio program creator. He is about to have published a 120-page beginner’s book on the history of astronomy and how the universe was created.



So You Want to Put On a Conference?

Larry Krumenaker



Conference organizing is tiring work, as indicated by the author taking a rest on the EMBL floor. Actually, on this second day of the conference, things were looking up—and into the DNA-inspired building structure (inset). Main photo: K. Schumaker

We all go to journalism conferences. We have fun. We eat. We meet people. Maybe we even learn something. Then we go home, usually oblivious to all the preparatory work done by the organizers. Looks easy, doesn't it?

Not.

I learned this last year in Heidelberg, where I was the Journalist in Residence at the Heidelberg Institute for Theoretical Studies (HITS). While there, I also did my annual work for the US National Association of Science Writers (NASW), which gives me access to the membership roster data. In the latter I noted that, counting myself, there were 40 NASW members in Europe. Forty people should be enough to make a kind of NASW-Europe chapter and have a meeting, right? I get to expand my network in Europe, too. Piece of cake.

Not. Again.

As a one-man conference committee, I got to see how ALL the usual committee roles take place. I'm glad I did it, but this is not for the faint of heart, nor for large conferences. Let me tell you what I learned putting on the *Science Tour of Heidelberg and Network Event* on September 27-28, 2015.

What You Need?

You need to:

- Get notices out to your target group to see if there is interest. Several times.**
- Get suggestions out OF your target group. Then get them to agree to attend.**
- Contact local science facilities and see if you can make use of them for tours.**
- Find good dates for all the facilities, something akin to herding cats.**
- Arrange lodging.**
- Arrange food.**
- Hold people to deadlines.**
- Arrange touring events.**
- Arrange transportation.**
- Arrange for a psychiatric vacation to follow the conference.**

First thing to learn is that **you will likely only get a tiny percentage of the population**

you hope will attend. At least half won't even reply to your request for interest in a new science journalism meeting. More will show interest but not actually attend. Expanding from NASW members, I contacted persons I knew in Europe in ISWA, and some of those sent out the messages to others, primarily in Germany (bless them...). **I set a lower limit of at least ten interested parties, ended up with 15, with a few later dropouts. Attrition happens.**

Programming

I actually ended up with one too many places to go! Fortunately(?), one place missed the deadline—by about ten days—and I wrote them out of the agenda, probably to my permanent blacklisting, but, hey, people you had deadlines...but it made my overall programming so much easier.



(Above) Dr. Volker Springel of HITS talks about dark matter during the morning, whereas (Right) Hanns-J. Neubert, German journalist, discusses how journalists can be mediators between the public and various newsmakers. All photos in this article are by L. Krumenaker, unless stated otherwise.

On the morning of the second day, a smaller contingent took buses up Königstuhl Mountain to the European Marine Biology Lab (EMBL) with its DNA-inspired central atrium. At EMBL we heard three well illustrated talks, had a tour, a smaller speed dating experience, and a lunch. The afternoon was spent at the House of Astronomy/Max Planck Institute for Astronomy. The House of Astronomy gave us a fantastic planetarium show, a tour of the several buildings, a telescope dome and the grounds, and what started as a group interview with several astronomers but ended up being a great give and take by the astronomers on how they can work better with the press. The second day went off without a hitch.

But not the micro-programming. At HITS, people kept having to make changes in their schedules with us, and so we had speakers and an unscheduled (by me, anyway) tour in the afternoon that cut into our workshops. **Next time—I am going to be firm on the schedule.**

The *Science Tour* consisted of a full day at HITS, with about half the morning being speakers or events, and the other half a speed-dating round-robin between journalists and representatives of the various research groups. The afternoon was more speakers (due to schedule glitches) and workshop/presentations provided by conference participants. These workshops included the German history of chemical weapons, a talk on the statistics of freelancing in Europe and America, a talk on journalists as mediators, and a new service for matching journalists with publishers and editors.





On the *Science Tour's* second day, (Left) one of three EMBL speakers gives his talk, prior to a smaller speed-dating event between journalists and researchers. (Right) Max Planck Institute for Astronomy scientists, led by House of Astronomy director Markus Pössel, turn the tables on journalists, taking the group discussion from their research to asking questions on how to work better with journalists.

Transportation

You can't get everywhere from here.

HITS is on a bus route on a mountain, served by one bus, once an hour. Miss it, you walk uphill or take a 12 Euro taxi. Our hotel was at Bismarkplatz, the central square in Heidelberg, next to the main bus connections, though NOT where the Hauptbahnhof (Main Train Station) is located. I arranged two-day transit passes as part of our hotel package so we didn't have to all find change and slow down the bus with our line of journalists. Ditto for the return trip, and on Day 2, a different bus to the EMBL. Kindly, EMBL provided us a bus to go to the nearby House of Astronomy after lunch, else we'd have to catch a very specific city bus, and do some walking. We took city buses down the mountain. **Note: be sure to have these all arranged in advance with the scheduled times well known, and have backup plans for those who miss the bus!**

Goodies and Money and Goodbye

As none of the facilities charged us anything, and provided transportation and/or sustenance, and everybody paid their own hotel bill, you would think the expenses would be minimal for the conference. Numerically, yes. Aggravation-ally, ha ha, no.

Getting the little things, such as badges and pens and paper simply took time. **Note: Do these things NOT at the last couple of days, if you can help it!**

Regrettably, we were just too small or too soon for anyone to give us travel scholarships, though I tried. I learned that appeals to various such groups were hindered mostly by the fact that a) nobody generally has money, b) timing was too short for some, and c) I was not a non-profit organization in some cases, though my American workshop company under an LLC umbrella sufficed for one. I ultimately got ~425 Euros for the goodies, extra passes and tickets, and the send-off event, from ISWA, EUSJA, and TELI, the last a German journalist group.

The send-off event was to be a trip along the Neckar River on a solar-powered boat, and those persons who did not stay in our hotel, arranged as part of a package, had to have the tickets purchased separately, as well as the transit passes. The money from the j-groups covered the goodies, the transit tickets and the boat tickets, with a bit left over to cover the conference committee's hotel room the night before and after. But when the few who were left got to the boat, the pilot refused to go out because he was below his limit. We think he just wanted to go home but when one attendee asked his name to call the Tourist Agency, he thought better of his strike, and we got a 'slightly short'-of-normal-time cruise.

Oh-Tell.....

The real headache was that hotel package! I used the Heidelberg Tourist Service. That I will never do again.

**Plan well ahead,
and negotiate
with the hotels,
inspecting them
in advance.**

They offered various packages, with hotels and reduced prices, event tickets and transit passes. But GETTING a package that worked for the *Tour* was not so straightforward. First, it was nearly impossible to get hold of a person, the decisions always dragged out, and at first the agency insisted on full payment in advance for the entirety of the possible number of conference participants! That is something I have never run into as part of program committees in the US, and way beyond my personal, let alone the conference's, funds! Lastly, participants had to order their packages within two days of making our package deal through the agency, which did not have reservations set up online, and as noted, hard to reach by phone. Those who succeeded had to receive their packets not at the conference or at the hotel but at the tourist information pavilion outside the Hauptbahnhof, which closed early in the evening, before some participants would arrive. But the program committee had to pay for the latecomers' packets in advance, and the extra boat and transit tickets for those not staying at the hotels.

The hotel turned out not to have been contacted by the agency. When I visited them, I made my own arrangements with them, to be sure we didn't lose our block of rooms, then unmake our arrangements when the agency caught wind of it. Furthermore, the building and rooms had "issues." One day's free breakfast was so skimpy that some went out to get more food. Our complaints did manage to improve the breakfast the next day, but that day saw a water main break that meant no showers available. Several of the participants fought a somewhat successful campaign to get a partial refund (though not all got the same amount) about six weeks later.

Take my advice...Plan well ahead, and negotiate with the hotels, inspecting them in advance. Charge an advance fee to cover the non-lodging costs.

And, book your restful vacation in advance. I messed up on that item as well. ✍️ **MI**

Larry Krumenaker is a self-publisher of books, magazines and other products out of the Atlanta, GA area. He currently is a Guest Researcher, teaching about science misconceptions, at the University of Cologne, Germany.