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DEAN'S DIGITAL WORLD

By Dean Tudor

The Blight or Boon of the Blogs?

The two hottest trends in the wired world of journalism appear to be blogs and RSS.

Bloggers have been around since the first Web site of Tim Berners (the innovator of the Web), but of course they were not interactive. I've had a blog of sorts for years at my Web site, but it isn't mounted daily nor is it interactive. The defining words are "Web log", a sort of diary that was abbreviated to blog. It has to be interactive, to allow comment from the field of readers. You can get software, a Web site, and maintenance for about \$99 a year. Microsoft will be incorporating blog construction into its next Windows, Front Page, or Word release. For the moment, you can check out www.blogspot.com which does most of the English language hosting.

The www.blogwise.com site is a free online directory to some 50,000 and more blogs around the world, in about 180 countries. The USA has over 30,000 such sites, UK has over 2,500 as does Canada, followed by over 1,000 in Australia. Most are in English, except for a few in French in Canada and Spanish in the USA. Brazil has over 1,500, Spain over 1,200, France about a thousand (about the same as Italy, the Philippines, and India). You can search by subject keyword, but most blogs are about three topics: politics, news or "blogs about blogs". One of my favourite "blogs about blogs" is Vinography (www.vinography.com) which keeps me posted about what is happening with all the other wine blogs.

The vast majority of blogs, though, read like secret diaries kept by teenagers. But some are important (for their news sources), and they are interlinked as part of the Web. Blogspot alone has about 40% of the blogs listed on Blogwise. All the blogs in the world get indexed by search engines, so they all appear equivalent to the "real" news.

Many journalists, reporters, and writers have blogs.



Canadians Norman Spector, Warren Kinsella, and Paul Wells come to mind. Many journalism students have blogs, in an attempt to get noticed. The journalism blogs make it easier for writers to put out stories, without editorial direction or interference. It is a more casual style of writing. And beginning with Matt Drudge, many blogs have taken to blowing whistles or releasing insider stories such as outing fake journalist Jeff Gannon, outing fake Bush documents on CBS, Trent Lott, CNN exec Eason Jordan. Word of mouth travels fast amongst the bloggers.

Indeed the proliferation of blogs is creating some havoc for traditional news sources. These media outlets are losing their audience, especially their young audience (18 – 34, the prized demographic). Thus, to them, bloggers are, as the *New York Times* described in a headline, "New Media Trophy Hunters". They are portrayed as raffish, "pretend journalists", swarming over a kill. Hey, isn't that pack journalism? Paparazzi anyone? Blogs are not loved by the media, because the bloggers are taking away all the trust that the media used to have. The influence and higher profile of blogs is having a terrific impact. Popularity is being equated with credibility. Bloggers that have links to each other increase their scope and reach, and become cited by others (including newspapers) – such that they can be near the top of search engine results.

Through Blogwise, you can get any blog as an XML or RSS feed (if supported by the local blogger). And this leads me to the next hot trend, the RSS feed. As I mentioned in my last column, RSS means something like "Real Simple Syndication", and it is a continuing supply of news items from all major news sources and blogs to your desktop via a usually-free software package such as FeedReader. You can set the software to automatically download headlines every time you venture out to the Internet. *New York Times*, *CNN*, *CBC*, *Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *Washington Post*,

Manchester Guardian, plus foreign language equivalents, will send you their headlines plus a short descriptive paragraph. In no time at all, you've got a bird's eye view of the world news. Then, just click on the headline and you'll be transported to the news/blog Web site. For those sites which require paid-for registration, at least you'll have the headlines and a description.

This means that user-created news gets spread around faster, and there is much more of it available to the world attached to the Internet. All by the miracle of RSS technology which does seem to be going hand in hand with blogging.

There is one nifty RSS feed called KlipFolio at www.serence.com, an Ottawa based firm which uses KlipFolio as a platform. It is free, and its main value is it hums along in the background with pre-shaped "klips" which organize the news reader. It is quite attractive and easy to use. I use it all the time and the headlines just scroll by when I want them. Oh, yes, also weather and sports and wine stuff. I very rarely read the papers anymore, except the *Globe* and the three free papers whenever I'm on Toronto's public transit.

But I still read books, as you can note from the Book Review section in *Sources*. Three books that recently crossed my path (I got them at a textbook fair) include:

A Canadian Writer's Guide (Third Edition) has been published by Thomson Nelson (ISBN 0-17-641413-4, \$38.95). At 384 pages it works for college students, covering the basics of writing, grammar, sentences, usage, punctuation, plus the heavy duty chapters on research essays and documentation, as well as essay exams and applied writing. The latter is new to this edition, with much emphasis on job-related writing skills. Other new material: more information from the Chicago Manual of Style, more on plagiarism (hey, doesn't that tell you something!), and more on literary analysis. A nice package....

Checkmate Pocket Guide (Thomson Nelson, ISBN 0-17-641528-9, \$25.95) is a leaner book, actually a 164-page spiral bound paperback, covering much the same ground of grammar, usage, punctuation, style basics, proofreading symbols, documentation (MLA, APA, Chicago, CBE). There's more explanation in the *Writer's Guide*, but more summaries in this *Pocket Guide*.

Internet Effectively, a beginner's guide to the World Wide Web (Pearson Addison Wesley, ISBN 0-321-30429-2, \$94.95) also has Sharon Scollard of Mohawk CAAT as a Canadian co-author to Tyrone Adams. They want you to expand your current skills by doing effective searches and maximizing your use of E-mail and e-commerce. Along the way the authors go into mailing lists, newsgroups, chat rooms, VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol), and security concerns. RSS, messaging, and blogging are also covered. There is a glossary and a bibliography. It is a very comprehensive book, worthy of your attention for brushing up or learning a new skill.

For the next six months, and for you to chew on until I write again, here are some more of the fascinating trends unfolding in the wired world of the news gathering:

For one, you can go over to yagoohoogle.com and see a comparison between Yahoo and Google search engines. The site has a split screen, allowing you to see at a glance what the top ten sites at each search engine are. This is fascinating,

especially when you look at the results and the ranking of the websites.

For another, Google has introduced a service which allows users to search the content of scholarly and sci-tech publications. This is "Google Scholar". Searches can be made of both the Web AND, with special agreements with publishers, part of the "invisible" Web. Results should include dissertations, as well as the usual papers and conference presentations. What's new are the additional factors used in ranking, such as WHERE a document was published and how many other scholarly works cite it. This used to be the exclusive realm of the series of Citation Indexes.

For a third, speech recognition technology has dramatically improved, such as with Dragon Naturally/Speaking (DNS) now in version eight. You can speak up to 160 words a minute. ScanSoft, the owner of DNS 8, claims a 99% accuracy. With fast chips and lots of memory, hardware limitations no longer hold back such major software. And watch out for Pentium Five this late fall...

Yahoo has a unique tracker in its portfolio of news tricks: the buzz. At buzz.yahoo.com, you can find a features reporter's dream – all the new trends and technologies, people, celebrity watching, cutting edge developments, what's in and what's out, and – most importantly – what's happening NOW, TODAY, THIS HOUR. You can even get it all as a news alert.

Still with Yahoo, there is now a "new" Yahoo News site. Yahoo manages to employ both human oversight with automation of the news from multiple sources. The company has agreements to display or link to content from about 100 news organizations, plus about 7,000 additional on-line sources that Yahoo catalogues for information.

In fact, there are many sources of news materials that can be checked on a timed basis. The material can either come to you by RSS or by clever arrangement of keywords. I use the following URLs, all bookmarked of course, to get me data about wines; I check them daily.

You can use these six URLs to get to the site, and then change the search terms to whatever you want to know about on a consistent basis:

Wine news via Google

Wine news via Yahoo

Wine news via Topix.Net

Wine news via AllHeadlineNews

Wine news via NewsNow

Wine news via RocketNews

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From the

PERIODICAL WRITERS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA (PWAC)

Cold Calling Without the Sweat - Tips for Freelance Writers

By Adrian Blake

When it comes to picking up the telephone to call a new business prospect, do you feel the icy grip of fear grab you around the throat? Does it twist your stomach into a knot?

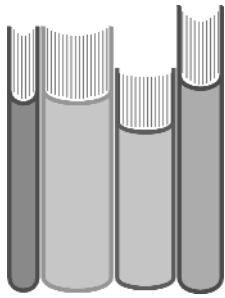
For many freelance writers, making a cold call ranks among their most feared things in life besides death and taxes. It's the dreaded fear of rejection that's to blame. The negative thoughts it generates can easily get translated into ambivalent intention which, in turn, gets transmitted to the person at the other end of the phone.

For those willing to conquer their fear, there's hope. Like any skill, the techniques of cold call marketing can be honed with practise and become an invaluable way to generate new clients for your freelance writing or editing business. How can you make cold call marketing really work for you? Here are a few tips when approaching corporate clients:

1. **Get centred.** To calm your mind and body before you begin to make calls, try meditation, visualization, yoga or other physical activity. Humour is a great stress-reliever, too. You'll find that proper posture when sitting helps you feel more mentally alert and allows you to project your voice.
Alternatively, try standing when making calls. It can help dissipate 'nervous' energy.
2. **Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse.** Repeat your script and get it down to a smooth delivery before calling. A great way to do this is by practising with a 'marketing buddy'. Don't forget to record your calls, both live and voicemail messages, to help you hear exactly how you sound.
3. **Get into a routine.** Make a habit of calling the same time each day. That will get you into a natural rhythm and a disciplined approach. To stay on track, set a goal for the month in terms of the number of calls you want to make. Then break it down into manageable numbers per week and stick with them.
4. **Stay in the flow.** Don't do anything else when you make calls so that you're not distracted. At the end of the scheduled time, stop. Try to finish on an upbeat note so that you'll look forward to making calls the next time.
5. **Take the pressure off.** When making contact for the first time, don't think of it as making a sales call. Cold calling is all about relationship marketing, not hard-sell telemarketing. Put yourself in the other person's position. Think of it as an opportunity to introduce yourself and to develop a rapport.
6. **Target the decision-maker.** When deciding who your prospect should be, make sure it's the highest person on the corporate ladder or the one who is in charge of the particular department you want to contact. Those are the people who have the power to hire you.
7. **Don't forget to smile.** When you smile, you make an immediate, positive impression on your prospect. They can hear that energy in your voice and it can be hard to resist. If you need a reminder to smile when you call, try placing a mirror or a sticky note with the word 'smile' in front of you.
8. **Keep it short and sharp.** When you introduce yourself, it shouldn't take longer than 20 seconds. Start by telling your prospect who you are, what you do, and state the main services you offer. Then, pose your question: "Do you work with freelance writers (editors)?" They can answer one of two ways: yes or no. Either one is an opportunity. When you get voicemail, that's also an opportunity. You get to leave a free 30-second commercial.
9. **Don't forget to listen.** One of the best things you can do after you have introduced yourself is to listen to the other person. On a practical level, active listening allows your prospect to provide you with important information and gives you the opportunity to address 'talking points.' It also indicates to your prospect your willingness to really hear and understand what they are saying.
10. **Always follow up!** What dooms many cold call campaigns is inconsistent or non-existent followup. Like they say: out of sight, out of mind. Following up on a regular basis not only maintains your momentum, it makes you stand out as a professional and keeps you 'front of mind' with your prospects.

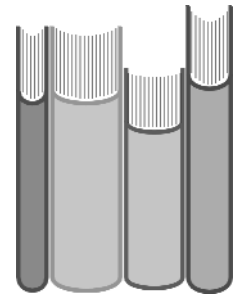
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B O O K R E V I E W S



BOOKS OF INTEREST

Reviewed by Dean Tudor



Reference Books for Journalists

The Canadian Writer's Handbook, 4th edition

William E. Messenger, et al

Oxford University Press

2005, 667 pages, \$46.95 hard covers,
ISBN 0-19-541825-5

There's a lot of these student/writer guides out there in the marketplace. For a purchase, I usually recommend that it be "Canadian" and that it be the largest available. Sometimes the largest ones have been made larger by the addition of exercises. There's nothing wrong with that, just be aware that exercises are included here. This current work has been a standard reference for the past 25 years, and it is now updated by two teachers from the UBC Writing Centre.

As with all such guides, the major topics are sentence construction, grammar, parts of speech and syntax, punctuation, "mechanics", spelling, diction and usage, composition, and research (with documentation citing styles of MLA, APA, Chicago, and the like). Canadian sources, spelling and usage are featured. There are fifty charts and

tables, plus appendices on symbols, proofreading checklists, checklists for revising papers, and editing.

The authors stress that the book is all about avoiding common errors in written English, and thus there are optional exercises to test one. Some attention is given to the requirements of non-native English speakers, although the book is not really an ESL type. There is an entry in the index for "English, as an additional language" followed by few page references.

Audience or interest level: students, writers, reference collections of libraries.

Some interesting facts: "Quotation" must be exact. A well-documented "paraphrase" reproduces the content of the original, but in different words. A "summary" is a condensation, a boiled-down version that expresses only the principal points of an original source.

What I don't like about this resource: the list of reference sources is to just books: no maps, no news sources, no Internet.

What I do like about this resource: there is a good summary on how to find what you need in looking things up in this particular book (table of contents, index, marking symbols, exercises).

★ **Quality-to-Price Ratio: 90.**

Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang

John Ayto and John Simpson

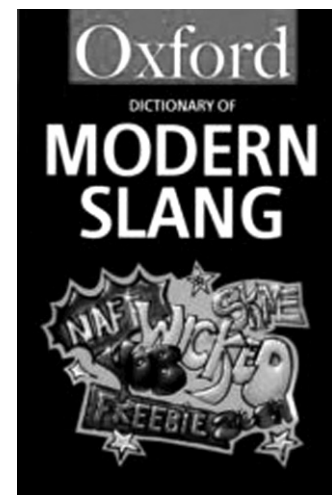
Oxford University Press

2005, 324 pages, \$22.95 paper covers,
ISBN 0-19-861052-1

Ayto has created dictionaries before, notably the wonderful *Food and Drink Dictionary*. This book was first published in 1992, and here it is revised and updated. There are 5000 slang words

and phrases here, words commonly found in the UK, North America, Australia, and other parts of the English-speaking world.

The compilers identify three types of slang: low life; professional arcane; and highly colloquial. Most of the slang in this book has been derived from the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The work contains the slang of the twentieth century, although the authors say that some minor terms have been dropped, plus



500 others currently in preparation for the OED but not yet published there. This then becomes an exciting preview, since that means 10% of the book has not yet appeared in Oxford dictionaries.

Some changes in approaches to words are also indicated. For example, the word "flapper" began as a late 19th century slang term for an unconventional woman. Now, it apparently means a young woman of the 1920s, and it is no longer considered slang. These can be tough calls to make when the limit of the book is only 5000 words.

For each entry there is a definition, an account of the origins, the date and

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first use in print, and a use example. The range is from “abaht” (UK, British dialect for “about”) to “zowie” (US, astonishment). There is also some UK rhyming slang here, but that needs to be approached with caution since there are so many rhymes that pertain to the UK only and are totally lost on the rest of the world – where does one cut it off?

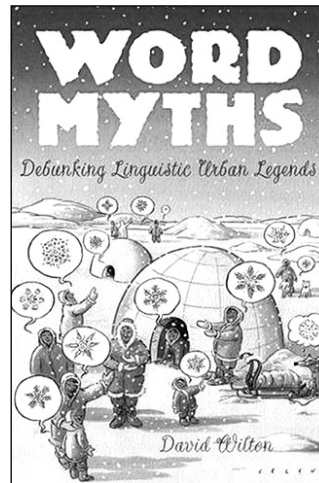
Audience or interest level: word hounds, reference libraries.

Some interesting facts: “The vocabulary of slang changes rapidly: what’s new and exciting for one generation is old-fashioned for the rest”.

What I don’t like about this resource: the slang term “sweet F.A.” here means “nothing at all”, and the “F.A.” is indicated as meaning “Fanny Adams”, a reference to doing nothing. I always thought that “sweet F.A.” was actually “SFA” and meant “sweet fuck all”. And to find THAT reference, you’ve got to look up “Fanny Adams” under “F” to find a “sweet fuck all”.

What I do like about this resource: well, there’s no use of Google or any other search engine to find slang on the Internet, so that makes it easier to freeze-frame the inventory of words. The book is a great read for bedtime. Or the john.

★ **Quality-to-Price Ratio: 93.**



Word Myths: Debunking Linguistic Urban Legends

David Wilton

Oxford University Press

2004, 221 pages, \$27.95 paper covers,
ISBN 0-19-517284-1

Wilton is the creator and editor of wordorigins.org, one of the best reference sites on the Web. In his introduction here, he answers two questions: what is a linguistic urban legend? It is a subcategory which propagates facts about word origins.

Many words or phrases here began life as jokes or hoaxes. Others were distorted facts. Wilton tries to sort it all

out.

The second question is: how to ferret out the truth? He uses historical dictionaries, and other dictionaries of slang, dialect and etymology.

The remainder of the book is a deconstruction of phrases (e.g., ring around the rosie is not about the bubonic plague, OK did not come from Andrew Jackson’s “oll korrekt”, nor the “Old Kinderhook” reference. Read the book to find out; it is absolutely fascinating.

There are extensive end notes, a detailed annotated bibliography, and an alphabetical index to the main words being discussed.

Audience or interest level: journalists (in order to help them stop perpetuate errors)

Some interesting facts: “Those of us who stand up and call for skepticism and reason know that there is little chance that we can stop the spread of these legends”.

What I don’t like about this resource: limiting, only 221 pages. There is much more stuff on the Internet for free.

What I do like about this resource: there is an indication that you can find more at alt.folklore.urban (Usenet) and www.snopes.com (Web), plus his own Web site.

★ **Quality-to-Price Ratio: 88.**

Computer Books for Journalists

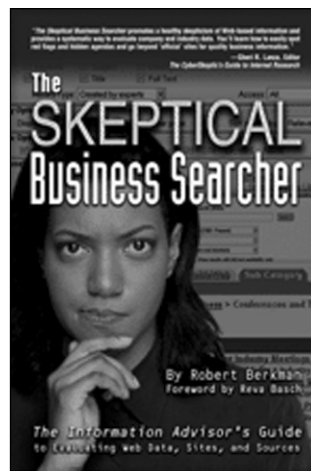
The Skeptical Business Searcher: The Information Advisor's Guide to Evaluating Web Data, Sites and Sources

Robert Berkman

Information Today, 2004, 281 pages,
\$44.95 paper covers, ISBN 0-910965-66-8

Berkman is the author of *Find It Fast*, and founder and editor of *The Information Advisor* newsletter published by Information Today, Inc. This current book is a basic online research guide to evaluating no-cost online information, particularly business data, on the Web.

He relies mainly on sites that promote “trusted” data (although in some



cases that trusted data maybe one-sided or unbalanced as in PR materials).

Thus, he covers company histories and overviews, corporate sales and earnings data, SEC filings and stockholder reports, public records, market research studies, competitive intelligence, industry analyses, staff directories, executive biographies, survey/poll data, press releases, news stories, niche markets, and small businesses.

He also comments on the invisible Web, the sites which have a no robots command.

All of these are illustrated with copious screen shots showing Web sites. He tries to show the reader how to recognize bias and misinformation, and this section is useful. There are interviews with investigators for tips and advice. His appendix has a list of referenced

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sites and sources, but this can also be found on the book's Web site (which is also updated) books.infotoday.com/skepticalbiz.

I'm not quite sure what the skeptic reference in the title is all about. There is a well-known saying in journalism: the difference between a skeptic and a cynic is that the cynic is better informed.

Audience or interest level: business

journalists, researchers, libraries.

Some interesting facts: "My number one source – heads and shoulders above the rest – is Gary Price's Resource Shelf" (www.resourceshelf.com)

What I don't like about this resource: we've seen it all before, even from a slew of books by Information Today, Inc. But this is the latest, and the most up-to-date. Also, for us in Canada, the material here is just American.

There is no reference to Bill Dedman's excellent powerreporting.com, Berkman's main competition.

What I do like about this resource: there is a ten point checklist for a systematic method to evaluate Web site reliability, with a list of other recommended evaluation checklists.

★ **Quality-to-Price Ratio: 87.**

Media Books for Journalists

Inventing Tax Rage: Misinformation in the National Post

Larry Patriquin

Fernwood Publishing

2004, 190 pages, \$24.95 paper covers, ISBN 1-55266-146-6

Patriquin is Assistant Professor of



Sociology, Social Welfare and Criminal Justice Studies at Nipissing University. His book is a polemic about alleged news distortions during the *National Post's* first year of publication: were Canada's supposedly high taxes causing damage to the economy? Did this cause tax rage amongst the middle class? Why did the *National Post* allegedly distort?

Patriquin believes that it was because the paper wanted to create an

agenda for the tax cuts that mostly benefits the wealthy. He does a nice job discouraging here, with the flashpoint themes of income tax, middle class, press and propaganda. He closely documents dozens of such occurrences by the *National Post* to create a right wing agenda. He firmly believes that nothing is balanced, that only one side of the story is told.

The book is a model for using the various forms of false logic and usage, such as improper context, loaded words and exaggeration, irrelevance and straw men, misleading statistics, factoids, false attributions of causality, unwarranted assumptions, anecdotal evidence, and false analogies.

Audience or interest level: the committed reader of journalism, reporters.

Some interesting facts: "The sole objective is to influence the public; hence, being right or wrong doesn't matter. The purpose of the misinformation is not to seek the "truth" or to engage in an exercise of intellectual rigour, one where logic will triumph when all is said and done".

What I don't like about this resource: specialized material, useful for an ethics or journalism class, but the students need to know how to follow the arguments.

What I do like about this resource: there is a bibliography to check out, and a handy glossary which explains automatic stabilizers, effective tax rate, fiscal dividend, marginal tax rate, etc.

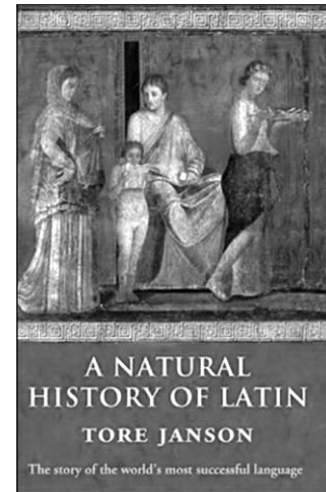
★ **Quality-to-Price Ratio: 89.**

A Natural History of Latin

Tore Janson; trans. and adapted into English by Merethe Damsgard Sorensen and Nigel Vincent

Oxford University Press

2004, 305 pages, \$38.50 hard covers, ISBN 0-19-926309-4



This book, by Janson who recently retired as a professor of languages at the University of Goteborg, was originally published in 2002 in Swedish. It is obvious that Janson loves Latin; it shows on every page.

Latin is the most influential language in the world. It supports the European Romance languages, English, the Roman Catholic Church, and most of the vocabulary in science-technology, law and culture.

This is pop history at its best, for the first 176 pages. He shows how Latin came about in the classical world, the

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Dark Ages, the Renaissance, and the Middle Ages. Latin as a language hit a bit of a rough patch by the end of the 20th century. It was not taught much in high schools. But it is now enjoying a comeback.

The last 100 pages of the book covers a summary of Latin grammar and lists of Latin words and phrases still in common use (e.g., *ad nauseum*, *post hoc*, *vox populi*, plus many legal and medical terms).

Audience or interest level: communicators, those who love languages.

Some interesting facts: Latin was part of Italic languages (e.g., Oscan, Umbrian) that became dominant when Rome became dominant, and soon became the lingua franca (so to speak) of the Mediterranean.

What I don't like about this resource: a bit short, I'd like more detail, especially on the Roman Catholic church.

What I do like about this resource: there is a bibliography of suggested readings. This is a straightforward, deft account, much like his 2002 book *Speak; A Short History of Languages*.

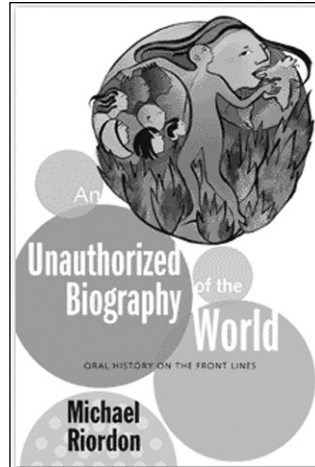
★ **Quality-to-Price Ratio: 90.**

An Unauthorized Biography of the World: Oral history on the front lines

Michael Riordon

Between The Lines

2004, 323 pages, \$26.95 paper covers,
ISBN 1-896357-93-8.



Riordon is the author of several other *Between The Lines* books, all using aspects of oral history. Indeed, this book uses oral history to discuss oral history. It is in memoir style, and delves

into how oral history is done in such places as First Nations (Canada), Turkey, Chicago, Newfoundland, Peru, New York City, Cleveland, Israel, and other places.

His concept is about telling stories, celebrating diversity, and making connections between people. He says the book looks at how an engaged oral history, working from the margins, seeks to address the issues of finding voices and making sense of the world. Social problems and social justice are uppermost in the themes, even in the chapter where Riordon interviews an audio conservator.

Audience or interest level: oral historians, students, libraries.

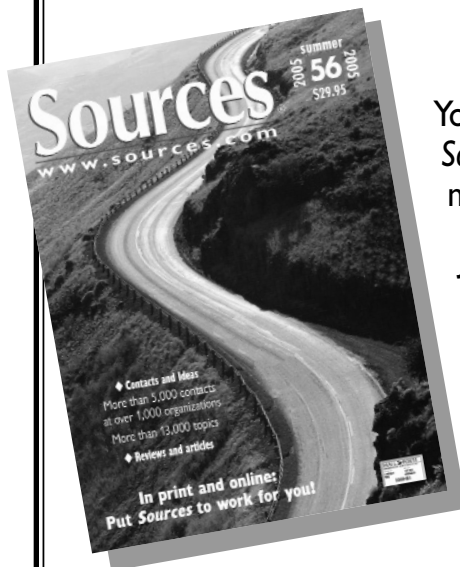
Some interesting facts: "Some of the people featured in this book call their work oral history, some do not. Some take issue with term, but most don't care much what it's called. They just do it."

What I don't like about this resource: no index! (that sort of fits in with oral history).

What I do like about this resource: there is a listing of Web sites dealing with oral history resources (international).

★ **Quality-to-Price Ratio: 90.**

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