

## Podcast 466: Thirty Years of IEW History

### Episode Transcript

**Andrew Pudewa:** We could probably list little things along the way that we didn't try hard to make happen, but did happen, because the work we are doing is fundamentally good, and we will continue to be blessed in that way.

**Julie Walker:** Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, "IEW." My name is Julie Walker, and I'm honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Julie, you have a big binder.

**Julie Walker:** Yes, I do.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I don't know that I've seen that binder. Maybe it's been on your shelf and I just never noticed, but you brought it in here for a reason.

**Julie Walker:** I did. I did. This is the topic of our conversation today. And this is a three inch binder that contains most of our newsletters and magalogs that we have published year after year after year. So it's been a while. I actually looked back at our podcast archives, and it has been a while since we've actually talked about those humble beginnings of IEW.

And I thought, it's time for us to talk about that again, and not, not to say, hey, look how great we've grown over the last 30 years, because it has been now over 30 years. But more importantly, just to, to reflect on what a wonderful, crazy journey we've been on. And when I say we, I, of course, joined you to work directly for you almost 18 years ago.

**Andrew Pudewa:** ago. Yeah, we'll have to have a big party at 20. Yeah. Well, this is nice. Um, I have some kids visiting and all of my kids worked in the business, too, in some capacity for some years, some more than others. And we visited the building where we now have our very, very, very, very big printing equipment, which Tim told me that if we had added up everything we've ever bought, it wouldn't even come close to being this big in terms of the magnitude and cost.

**Julie Walker:** But at the same time, if we were to count up everything we've printed over the years, and actually in a recent podcast, you made mention of publishing a book through Amazon or through Print Place, and I almost interrupted you, so I'm just going to say this right now. We print our own materials right here in Oklahoma, in the good old U. S. of A. So we're not outsourcing our printing.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, and we made a conscious decision to do that for many reasons. One of them is your favorite thing, quality control.

**Julie Walker:** Absolutely.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But there were others: we like to employ people. We like to create opportunity. We like to build, we like to be as independent as possible.

**Julie Walker:** Yes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** We still have to buy everything.

**Julie Walker:** Yes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But my daughter who was there, she just was kind of reflecting on the early days when she was a teenager working with me doing this stuff.

**Julie Walker:** Working the office copier, because that's what we were using at the beginning.

**Andrew Pudewa:** She was kind of in awe looking at this massive, huge, high speed printing, machining, punching, and collating equipment and all that, and she just turned to me, she goes, Daddy, would you ever have imagined? And I said, No, I would never have imagined.

**Julie Walker:** Well, I'm going to open up this binder. And actually what's at the top of the binder is our 2019 Magalog. So we've had to start another binder because no more can fit in here. But now if I go all the way to the back, cause this is newest to oldest, right? So if I go all the way back, Andrew,

**Andrew Pudewa:** I think I've got one even older than that.

**Julie Walker:** Well, maybe you do.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I will dig it up for you.

**Julie Walker:** But I have volume one, number one, and this is, this is just an electronic copy. What actually exists in this binder is the..

**Andrew Pudewa:** The printed ones that we

**Julie Walker:** that were mailed out. This was sent to, you mentioned Tim, Tim's wife. This is a newsletter that she received in, what's the date on this one? Somewhere of 1999,

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh my heavens, Tim's family was on our mailing list way back then!

**Julie Walker:** And they lived in Virginia at the time.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, how sweet. That's wonderful. Well, I do remember those early days because I did everything. And my wife knew that when I had to create The newsletter, we didn't call it a magalog back then, but a newsletter. I would go into complete monk mode.

I would disappear from the family. I would be up until 2am every night for 3 or 4 nights. And she said, Well, this is kind of like the version of giving birth.

**Julie Walker:** Absolutely. I have in my hand, and actually, if you have the real copy of this, I would love to add it to this.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I think I might. I found an old, old file of stuff the other day I was cleaning out. And I thought, I gotta save this and show it to

**Julie Walker:** Oh, that's awesome. So this is volume one, number one. The very first one.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, I must've had some ambition to just name it that, like there's going to be more than one? There's going to be volumes?

**Julie Walker:** So total spider webbing here. Do you know that from an event standpoint, it is a huge faux pas to call an event the first annual event? For that very reason, you don't know if there's going to be any more after that. You can start with the second annual event, but just call it the Turkey Trot. And then next year, you can call it the second annual...

**Andrew Pudewa:** I didn't do that with events.

**Julie Walker:** No, but that, no,

**Andrew Pudewa:** But I did it with the newsletter.

**Julie Walker:** That makes sense. It does make sense. So this was in March of 1996. And the title is the first issue of A Newsletter of Structure and Style. And you said when you're opening article, which I have to laugh about this. Your opening article is basically asking people to come up with a name for the newsletter, which we have one now, *The Arts of Language*, which we've developed over the years.

Here's the other thing that makes me smile. I'm going to read the first couple sentences. *With this first issue of what will hopefully be a successful cooperative effort of parents, teachers, and students to share and expand their ideas of teaching writing with the Structure and Style approach, comma, we wish to initiate a contest to title the newsletter.*

Now, what you have is you've got a number five in the margin because you started with a

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, did I put the indicators in?

**Julie Walker:** clause, yeah, exactly. And you have *hopefully* underlined and *initiate* a nice strong verb here. So there, your first paragraph, you didn't do this throughout, but you're basically demonstrating that you use the appropriate

**Andrew Pudewa:** I can do the checklist. Yeah.

**Julie Walker:** This is actually in March of 1996, and like I said, I only have the first page for some reason. you have a notice at the bottom of this page. Notice, seminar attendees may always audit for free. This was if people

**Andrew Pudewa:** Came to a TWSS seminar. They could come back and sit in again at no

**Julie Walker:** at no cost write, right? And if you're listening to this and want to attend perhaps our virtual *Teaching Writing Structure and Style* Workshop, and you've already attended one, let us know and we'll see if we can still allow them to

**Andrew Pudewa:** We kind of do that with the Premium Membership access to the videos for as long as you need up to the year, and then you can renew for cheap.

**Julie Walker:** But wait, wait, I want to get to this one sentence first.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, okay, go ahead.

**Julie Walker:** then you can opine a little bit about this and why that's so valuable. *If you have ever attended an IEW seminar and wish to repeat any or all of it the next time we are in town, it's free. Just call.* And the reason, what I'm pointing out here is.

Even back in March of 1996, IEW was IEW, and we've had some confusion over the years. Are we EIW? Are we IEW? We actually sometimes get purchase orders that are incorrectly named, and so we have to correct that because we want to make sure that we can get the funds from the school because we're IEW. But what compelled you first of all to come up with the name the Institute for Excellence in Writing?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Do you really want to know

**Julie Walker:** I do and the need to shorten it. When did you first shorten the name to IEW?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, we barely escaped me naming it the Institute for the Achievement of Excellence in Writing, which would have not been as smooth. And the reason is because I had worked for an organization that I loved deeply. I still do to this day, deeply love what I learned there. And that was the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

That was divided, and it was called institutes, plural, because it was divided into three sections, the Institute for the Achievement of Intellectual Excellence, Institute for the Achievement of Physiological Excellence, and Institute for the Achievement of Physical Excellence. And those were different teams of people who were teaching programs of treatment for brain injured children.

And so that was IAHP. And they still exist to this day and had my life and family circumstances been different, I don't know. I might have just stayed there. I loved it. I was profoundly happy. I was learning. It was great. So when I left, I went and taught violin for a few years, and then I got the idea to teach these writing seminars.

And so kind of as a nod, as a realization that so much of my thinking had been formed at the Institutes, which was the short version for them, right, IAHP, I thought, well, I could have the Institute for the Achievement of Excellence in Writing. And I thought, that doesn't really even fit on the top of a piece of paper very nicely. So I dropped the achievement business and just said Institute for Excellence in Writing. So that's how it came to be. Imitation.

**Julie Walker:** right. Absolutely.

**Andrew Pudewa:** You find something good that you love and respect, you're naturally going to want to imitate that. So that's how I got the name going. I also like the idea of being an institute because that feeling of, maybe right now it's just me with a little help from Webster, but not really, but someday there's going to be more people, and we want to be an educational thing.

And so institute just sounded like the right name rather than whatever else you could call yourself. And some people have been a little confused because they think, well, an institute, shouldn't it have, like a building and be classrooms and be a thing where people go like a college or university or something.

And we wanted anything like that back then. Now we have buildings, and we even have classrooms, and we have video courses and all that stuff. But in the beginning, I guess I had to figure out and call it something. That's how it all happened and I'm very grateful. And now the fact that people literally all over the world know of IEW and the fact that I put that in that first newsletter, IEW, I don't know if that was conscious decision at the time or it was just, I can't fit it in the space— the whole name.

**Julie Walker:** That's right. All those hours that you were up trying to format

**Andrew Pudewa:** Or just the fact that, where I worked, everybody called it IAHP. And so that. And it's not really even an acronym, although when I started traveling and teaching kids, I would give them my email address if they wanted to send me their completed composition and I'd mail them a joke.

And at that time, my email was IEW at something else, because we didn't have a domain at that point. And I would tease them and say, IEW stands for EW, which is what everyone says when they hear they have to come to a writing class. It made a little humor for them.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. Well, and of course, fast forward, I don't know how, you probably know, Andrew, but it was probably around 2012, so it would have been 13, 14 years later, we actually did get the domain IEW. com, and there we are.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, at the time, it seemed like a really big investment just because three letter domain names had already become rather expensive. We managed to acquire it. And, at this point, thank the Lord. If we'd been at excellenceinwriting.com all these years, it wouldn't have been nearly as smooth.

**Julie Walker:** Great. Well, and of course, excellenceinwriting. com was our previous domain that it now, of course, redirects if anybody were to put that in there, they would redirect to IEW. com, but our email addresses. I am really grateful that I can say my email address is, here you go, listener, here it is, julie@IEW.com. And then people don't have to know how to spell julie@excellenceinwriting.com.

**Andrew Pudewa:** No, it was, it seemed like a, it seemed like a very expensive thing to do at the time, but in retrospect, it's a fantastically good decision, and put to it as I would look at it as just one of the ways in which Providence has blessed us with the right opportunity at the right time. And then the fortitude to make the decision and take the risk.

**Julie Walker:** And I'm going to ask you a question, Andrew, and listener, I have to let you know that oftentimes we come into these podcasts and he says, what are we going to talk about today? And I give him the topic and he goes, okay, and he has no idea where I'm leading this. So this is going to be one of those times, Andrew, and you can just totally shut me down.

**Andrew Pudewa:** You've got my suspense going.

**Julie Walker:** You mentioned the name IEW shortened, and now we have the domain as a point of providence in our business. Can you think of a few more, of opportunities that we've, that you've seized that have taken us to where we are today?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, there's probably too many possibilities, but there was one fairly large homeschool organization, it was a national organization. They found out about us, and this was pre 2000, so it was still a part time gig for me, and I was running around. We didn't have any products except for the TWSS, and they somehow found out about the Structure and Style and thought it would complement what they were doing, and they contacted me and said, would you come and make some videos for our people.

And when I say large, they had national conferences with 20,000 people in a coliseum, in the university coliseum. So it was a big thing. And I said, yeah, sure. And they said, well, we'd prefer not to pay you. But we've seen your existing videos. And We could probably improve on those. So if you would make some videos specific for us and our curricular orientation, we would remake your videos with better everything.

And I thought, well, that sounds like a pretty good deal because it was expensive back then and I didn't have it. I was just bootstrapping the thing with the little bit of money I could make. I would try to do something, improve something. I didn't have credit lines. I didn't have resources. I didn't have strong cash flow. I didn't have anything. So this sounded like a pretty good deal. So I did that. It was in Chicago. And the quality of that video, and we did this in the year 2000, just completely upgraded everything about what we were doing, and it went so well, the next year they said, we'll come back and you could do some more.

And I had been fooling around with the Student Writing Intensive, and so we did that. In those days, good, top quality video cameras were \$50,000 a piece, and they had everything. They had the best cameras, the best lighting, the best background, they even had steamers to get the wrinkles out of stuff. It was beyond anything I would have imagined.

That gave us a product that we could sell with confidence in terms of: is the quality of the presentation reflective of the quality of the content? And that, I would say, was the biggest point of Providence, was just the connection with that organization. That lasted for its time period. The other thing is we were back on VHS tapes back then, and when you were getting duplication done, it was a case where if you could do a large quantity, you could get a much better price, but you had to have a big expense up front. They made an arrangement where I could just buy copies in any quantity at a cost way lower than I would have had to say do a thousand to get that price.

**Julie Walker:** Nice.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And so that enabled me to have a good product with decent margin and not have to stockpile huge amounts of inventory. Because I was working while you remember in this little tiny converted barn garage thing and didn't have a lot of space. So that was, one point.

And another thing I might point to is just how. Again Providence, faith, my belief that God wanted me to be doing what I was doing brought me really key people. And you were early in the game there. I think of Cameron, our IT wizard master. He just called me out of the blue one day and says, I think I'd like to work for you. And I thought, I do not need another mouth to feed. I'm barely scraping by. And within a few months, he had made himself invaluable and I could repeat that story for many of the people that work with us now. It's just the Lord sent the right people at the right time to build the organization into what it is. And that's still happening.

**Julie Walker:** Well, and can I share a little story?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, of course.

**Julie Walker:** It was about maybe six or seven years ago, the church that my husband and I were attending was looking for a new building. So they were looking around at existing churches, and they found this little church in South Bixby. And they were concerned that it was too remote and too small.

I was coming back from an all day meeting in Oklahoma City, which is about two hours, and my husband, who was on that committee to find a new building, called me and Tim, who was with me, and said, we found a building that we think IEW would want to purchase. Well, long story short is we are sitting in that

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, and it wasn't even listed. It was a completely networked thing. And when we bought it, we got a whole lot of bonus stuff like tables

**Julie Walker:** The chair, the chairs that we're sitting on right now were part of the package.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Some of this stuff we got, we've since disposed of—a couple pianos and various—it required a little bit of internal improvements to be ready but thank heavens for this building. And now we have the video studio here and because of that we were able to get people.

**Julie Walker:** Well, you're speaking about the videos, the videos that you had produced with this organization, the way that they recorded them all those years ago, there was no possible way they could be streamed. And so that was a big goal for us.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Right, there was not digital technology back then.

**Julie Walker:** And there were other reasons why we wanted to improve on those videos, but we were able to do that here. However, I won't say cheaper. Because, of course, we had to buy this building to make that happen.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But the ease and the convenience of...

**Julie Walker:** The convenience.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And then the consistency, whereas if we had to go rent studio space every week for two years, it would have been ridiculous. Plus everybody loves it here. A lot of space around. Some of our employees like to go out and play, Frisbee golf or disc golf, I guess. We have space for that.

So yeah, it's completely provident.

**Julie Walker:** And, yes, it's a little bit remote, but compared to where IEW, the main headquarters is, which is out in Locust Grove, this is nothing. This is really close.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Some people just moved into houses right in the neighborhood

**Julie Walker:** This is true. This is true. But we also have horses. Our neighbors have horses, and so it's just fun to feel like you're still in the country.

**Andrew Pudewa:** You see the horses running through the field from time to time and you think, oh, that's so beautiful. It is a very poetic place. So there's that. We could probably list dozens and dozens, if not hundreds of little things along the way that we didn't try hard to make happen, but did happen. And we took the leap of faith. Buy the domain, buy the building, hire the person, acquire a very big printing equipment. Because every indication is that the work we are doing is fundamentally good, and we will continue to be blessed in that way. And we'll have faith. And if the whole thing falls apart someday, well.



**Julie Walker:** Then that's Providence too, right? So Andrew, as we're closing, I would like for you to just kind of recall the article you wrote for this year's Magalog. I have a stack of Magalogs here. And like I said, we have another binder that starts in 2020, and we're adding to that now. But the 2025 Magalog, you wrote an article, Writing Maketh an Exact Man. And I love how you start it. Where you're talking about actually buying this printer and how the finance guy was like “Really? Should we take a risk on you?”

**Andrew Pudewa:** Is there a market? I mean, he had two questions. One was with the explosion of ebook everything, and we see this in a lot of public schools. There's this push towards the paperless classroom. “Do you think people will still want to buy paper to learn this?” That was his first question. The second question is, “With the advent of very cheap or free AI, being able to write as good or better than most people, will there still even be a market for teaching writing?”

And I answered the question as best I could in a Skype call trying to convince a guy that, yeah, he should loan us a huge amount of money so we can buy this thing. But it stuck with me in terms of the answer to those questions is really at the core of why we do what we do and how we do what we do.

On the first level, you would say, there's huge research that shows that if children learn to read and write on paper, they learn better than screen. And, I got a whole talk on that that I gave probably 10 years ago now.

**Julie Walker:** Link in the show notes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Paper and Pen: What the Research Says. And that hasn't changed. If anything, it's probably even more pronounced and the people that are attending to this and saying, no, let's keep real books in the classroom. Let's have children learn to write on paper. they tend to be the more traditional. They may or may not call themselves classical. The schools that are doing that, both public and private, as well as the homeschoolers, which would be probably the majority of homeschoolers. They understand this. And so, yes, there's that market. And if anything, it's growing as a segment within the larger education market. So that's a good thing.

And then the problem of AI, we've talked a little bit about this on previous podcasts, I'm sure we will talk about it on more podcasts, but yes, there's utility in saying to chat GPT, please write “blah” or please summarize “blah,” or please create something for me that is language based. If you don't know what you want, you won't be able to judge what it's giving you. And then you're losing discernment, and then you're losing the authority over the technology.

And to summarize, because we only have a few minutes left: What we see, we've seen this from ancient times up throughout all of history, but we see it very, very much in the last few decades. And that is technology will atrophy the skill which it replaces. And so if we are outsourcing our spelling to a spell checker, we won't know how to spell. Maybe you're okay with that. Maybe you're not. If we're outsourcing our calculation, our ability to do math in our

mind to think better about stuff. And we in business are constantly having to think mathematically and the faster and better we can do that internally, the more it's going to inform our decisions. Right?

But if we outsource that to calculators and or AI, well, now we don't have the ability to think in that same way, and the same thing, of course, with language. So, I believe that most parents and teachers think that, they believe that there's still value in students learning how to choose and put words into sequences to represent ideas, whether or not the student can do that better than the technology is moot.

It's like saying, well, why would you have a 10 year old do math problems when you could just give them a calculator and then get the right answer more often than not. But they would lose the capacity to judge the answer that the calculator gives

As being reasonable, as being in the zone of accuracy, and could come up with crazy, ridiculous answers by pushing the wrong button.

Right. And that same thing I think we could see with with AI. So, all of us are experimenting to see what can chat GPT do? And yeah, it's going to get better, but it can't if we allow it to replace our discernment. I think that's the best word to use. Synonyms, our judgment, our ability to choose how to use it, then we've really lost control.

And I suspect there's going to be two, we're going to see a further stratification in society of the educated and the uneducated. And part of that stratification is going to be people who know how to use the AI because they know stuff. And the people who don't know stuff. And are just accepting whatever the AI is giving them and trusting the God in the machine

**Julie Walker:** yes

**Andrew Pudewa:** That would be my, and that was kind of what I tried to put in that article, although I'm sure with the help of our editing team, the article is better than my little monologue right now.

**Julie Walker:** Well, and I will just say that and that is worth some of the foibles that we've made, the victories and the successes that we've had by God's grace, truly. So it is wonderful to be a part of this great work that we're doing here at IEW. And dear listener, we are so grateful to you for joining us on this journey.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And anyone who's just passing through Tulsa wants to come and see our lovely Bixby building and video studio.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah, and the printer is not in this building. It's just about six miles away.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But if you're super curious...

**Julie Walker:** We could take it there too. Yeah, definitely. Thank you, Andrew.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Thank you.

**Julie Walker:** Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast in iTunes, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at [IEW.com/podcast](http://IEW.com/podcast). Here you can also find show notes and relevant links from today's broadcast. One last thing: would you mind going to iTunes to rate and review our podcast? This really helps other smart, caring listeners like you find us. Thanks so much.