



K I N G D O M *of* I N K

## *Margaret Howe*

Creative Copywriter, Memoir Ghostwriter,  
Developmental/Line Editor, & Writing Coach

**hourly:** \$65

Margaret Howe is an internationally produced playwright, copywriter, ghostwriter, and author driven by empathetic storytelling. She holds an MA in Playwriting and Screenwriting from City, University of London, and is a previous Edward Albee Fellow. Whether she's developing website copy, writing promotional short films, or scribbling outlandish stories in the margins of her notebook, she follows one principle. Good stories capture attention. The best stories resonate. Margaret is a wordsmith fascinated by the human experience. Her goal is to listen, to learn, and to translate your ideas with creativity and empathy in mind. Don't just grip your audience, compel them.

Margaret fosters her own narrative through travel, trips to the cinema, and by organizing local showcases to inspire new work from writers and musicians.



*Book a Call with Margaret*

# portfolio contents

Shallow Wells of Support.....	3
Somewhere to Be.....	7
Haunted.....	9



# Shallow Wells of Support

## (Blog Excerpt)

Margaret Howe

When your survival depends on the favor of much larger forces, the impact of slipping through the cracks is devastating. We applied for the second round of the Illinois Business Interruption Grant and have been informed we did not receive funds.

Our initial reaction: “damn.” A disappointment, certainly. We realize many are desperate for assistance during this crisis. It’s understandable that systems would become overwhelmed and funds would disappear. It was only upon glancing at the list of businesses who received funds, provided in our rejection email, that our disappointment grew into frustration.

A few neighboring businesses in Wicker Park, male and non-minority owned, received funds. Several franchises that have never been asked to shutter themselves completely, including Dunkin’ Donuts and Subway, received \$40K. A restaurant in Sugar Grove known to have repeatedly broken COVID-19 guidelines received over \$100K. One of the biggest kickers: our attorney’s office, whom we know to be working remotely, received \$60K.

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As a woman and disabled-owned company blending the lines between immersive theater, gaming, and community activism, we are consistently asked to play various roles. We’re told to earn our critical assistance by demonstrating innovation and creativity.

When the pandemic hit, we recalibrated. As well as maintaining our business, we reached out to our community. We hosted several blood drives and partnered with Uprising Theater and Artists’ Resource Mobilization to help provide work for artists, as well as hold and distribute PPE.

We now offer virtual escape rooms, immersive mystery theatre, and space rentals for small photo and video productions. I myself, the owner of Escape Artistry, was rushing to memorize lines for a last-minute murder mystery role when I saw the notification that our BIG application was denied.

It isn't that our business model has failed; our services are still in high demand. We receive in-person escape room requests and large private event rental offers on a weekly basis. Because of the risk our industry poses, we are incapable of accepting them.

As we continue to navigate this pandemic, I see an opportunity to highlight the irresponsibility in assuring artists, individuals, and businesses that, if they simply work hard enough, if they demonstrate innovation, creativity, and follow the rules, they'll earn the assistance necessary for survival. This is a dangerous myth.

This statement was especially irresponsible to perpetuate with respect to the BIG grant, as only 20% of the proposed applicants received payment, but the myth of the hardworking, scrappy hero runs deep in Chicago's artistic community, and is all the more dangerous on this grander scale.

Our city glorifies counterculture. We praise creatives who risk stability for the sake of passion and echo success stories of those who disregard the status quo.

The product of these forsaken stabilities can be beautiful: intimate theater performances in church basements, pop-up art shows, and community organizations utilizing art to inspire activism. We talk at length about the success stories, only describing obstacles they face as proof of their perseverance. We glorify their struggle without acknowledging the support they received, nor privileges they had, inherent to their success.

What are we doing to encourage and uplift those whose creativity we boast?

There is great enthusiasm for the artists who bring vibrancy to our streets. Murals become tourist destinations and photoshoot backgrounds, emblems of pride whose presence we defend.

When a global pandemic hits and ravages your livelihood, this enthusiasm does little to keep you going. Rent moratoriums, small business incentives, and direct financial assistance do.

The day after learning our BIG application was denied, a particularly

enthusiastic rental request came through that would break COVID-19 protocols. With grit teeth, we turned down the offer. Our community obligation will always hold priority over finances, but it would be disingenuous to say we didn't feel tempted.

This money would have been a critical liferaft. It's disheartening to know that businesses like ours are continually forced to weigh individual survival over long-term public health consequences. Turning down this contract should have been a much easier decision to make.

The quick draining of BIG funds is merely one example of our widespread scarcity of support. There's only so much honey in the pot, and we're all clamoring to ensure survival. It's up to those in power to demonstrate both transparency and conscientious consideration in their distribution of resources.

As one example of Chicago's many struggling small businesses, we would like to implore those with power to wield it thoughtfully.

If we are going to continue to perpetuate the myth of the American Dream, we should at least consider the narrative. We glorify the scrappy heroes of the story only after they have demonstrated enough privilege to reach the top.

This pandemic is not a test of resiliency, but an opportunity to prove our dedication to the ultimate myth. COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted minority-owned small businesses. What support are we offering the protagonists of this story to ensure they make it through the fateful montage? And when we do open opportunities for support, how closely are those distributions scrutinized?

Small businesses, especially those in hard-hit sectors, shouldn't be forced to pit against national chains for crisis funding. It isn't a fair fight, and it isn't a necessary one.

By establishing policies to incentivize businesses who follow the rules, and encouraging those with the means to support those without, we could form a bridge of support between businesses concerned over profit margins and those focused on paying the rent.

This year has created a gaping hole where there was once a divot. As the businesses scaling this descent, we need to maintain perspective on where we fall and ensure we're doing what we can to catch our fellow scrappy heroes

before they slip through the cracks.

What's most important, however, is imploring those above us to do the same.

We're not asking for a deus ex machina, a random twist of fate, but rather a collective effort. The heroes who survive COVID-19 will not be those who clawed their way into the honey pot. Our heroes are the communities working to share resources and keep others afloat.

To those above us, please remember: rising tides lift all ships.

# Somewhere to Be

Margaret Howe

As featured in The Prince Charles Cinema newsletter, June 2020

As an outsider, it wooed me.

I'm from Chicago, a failed expat who spent just under three years living in London. I wouldn't say the city welcomed me with open arms; it just sort of batted its eye when I arrived and kept doing its thing. I respected it, though. It was freeing to exist in a city far too busy with itself to pay you any mind.

A co-worker tipped me and my then boyfriend off to The Prince Charles Cinema. "The best cinema in London." When he mentioned beer and pizza night, I was sold. Ferris Bueller was my first experience, way too fitting for a Chicago broad. Hooked. It felt like home.

As life happened - deadlines, deaths, breakups - PCC was a constant. I was lucky enough to live off the Northern line, so if I was ever feeling anxious, overwhelmed, or lonely, I hopped on the train and caught a movie in 30 minutes or less.

I remember discovering escapism as a kid. My dog died. My parents picked us up from school, drove us to the animal hospital, and we took turns saying goodbye. We all cried. My brother saved a tuft of her fur. She was a really fucking good dog. When we came home I went to the basement, sat on our pull out couch, and turned on the TV. Something to look at.

The PCC amplified that feeling. I had somewhere to go, people to be around, popcorn, M&Ms, and mustard and onion pretzels. It was my therapy. And in Chinatown, no less. I got to explore the lights and chaos, all while rushing to catch a movie, cutting past tourists like I myself wasn't one.

It was also fantastic people watching. A symphony of weirdos. I remember standing in line to see Yoga Hosers with Kevin Smith. I thought I loved the guy, but listening to the bubbly girl behind me with Powerpuff barrettes gleefully recount podcasts, Q&As, and fun facts about his daughter, I realized I was in the presence of a superfan. She had come by herself. Symphony of weirdos.

Groundhog Day on Groundhog Day became a tradition, I rediscovered my love of stop motion (which I then pursued in my own work) during Ma vie de Courgette, saw details in the Gummo spaghetti I never would have noticed on a TV screen, caught matinees with just enough time to make my evening work shift, and I laughed - often before the jokes even landed - alongside maybe five strangers at a weekday screening of A Christmas Story.

I miss it. The accessibility, the passion, the weirdos. It was my somewhere to be, and I can't wait to be back.



# Haunted

Margaret Howe

Every now and then I'm reminded that I'm haunted.

I've said this fact out loud. Several times. I've used it to kill time at work, drunkenly declared it at parties, and admitted it to concerned friends during an odd happening or two.

This is the first time I've written it. I'm nervous about that. There's humoring your coworkers, and then there's detailing your insanity on the internet. For that reason I won't name my ghosts (I'm fairly certain I know the identity of at least one of them). The internet lasts forever.

The interactions with my spirits feel, generally, harmless. They're never brutal, they never persist for too long. It's radios flipping on at the highest volume, and ornaments toppling to the ground. It's the discovery of poignant notes from decades prior, marked X's on my bed, and the chill feeling of someone watching you from above.

I try not to think about the latter as it happens; that one spooks me most. When things fall, I can pick them up. When someone hangs above, I can't do much other than get stoned and go to sleep.

I am prone to sleep paralysis. These two features of my life have always felt conjoined. It was after an especially stressful evening of being pinned to my bed, hands gripped around my shoulder, a mouth nuzzled and whispering nonsense into my hair, that the X's arrived. Since then, I've run into the odd happening on a fairly consistent basis.

I tried tracing the sleep paralysis back, connecting it to past traumas, explaining the invisible forces away. No cigar.

But I've learned to live with occasional reminders. Sometimes ornaments just fall. Sometimes I'm pinned down. And, sometimes, chill air just lingers above.

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