

The
Wow

e-newsletter

by Ken and Dahlynn McKowen

Principles

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Safety in Numbers

Whew, talk about coming in under the wire! We made the release of July's issue by hours—literally. If we missed sending out this month's issue, we would have squelched our record of creating an e-newsletter every month for nearly five years.

Originally, our topic for July was completely different (now saved for a future issue), and here's the reason why: Upon returning home from nearly three weeks' worth of out-of-state travel-writing assignments, we were alerted that our private computer server had been hacked. Our hearts instantly sank to our stomachs!

Publishing Syndicate has used the services of a national hosting company for almost a decade with nary a problem until July 27th, our first full day back in the office. After fun working trips to Idaho, Yellowstone, the Grand Tetons, Wyoming and Utah, we came back to more work: a zillion e-mails and phone calls to answer, travel articles to pen, final copyedits on our *Wine-Oh!* manuscript to complete for our publisher, writing the front matter for the Oregon/Washington travel book, and whipping up this e-newsletter. Add to this the possibility of an infected server and five computers—ugh!

We learned from the company that someone entered our private server and imbedded threatening "scripts" (files) that, at a future date, would become active and access all of our passwords. The hacker also imbedded scripts to post files onto our website. Fortunately, the hosting company disabled the intrusive program (for your computer people, it was an `udp.pl` file); the next course of action was to see if the scripts were also imbedded onto our five networked computers (two PCs, two laptops and a Mac which we use for photos and layouts). A computer tech fixed the problem and returned us to working status today, July 31st.

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P . S .

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Safety in Numbers

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There are several lessons to be learned from this viral intrusion, lessons we felt strongly about sharing with you, our readers. Writers yourselves, it's a good bet you have your intellectual property in electronic form. What would you do if a hacker got into your system and comprised your "great American novel," your life's work or your writing hobby? What about stealing your bank password, social security numbers or even your identity? For the record, we're not computer experts. But we know enough and feel comfortable passing along the following information to you on a friendly, informal basis.

Let's start with protecting your computer. It's a no-brainer that you should have an antivirus program running on your system. We use Norton and run full system scans quite often. But we learned that Norton isn't a fail-safe program; the tech found both Trojan Horses and Malware on our primary computer. If your system is acting wacky, and Norton or a like antivirus software doesn't find anything, you should have your computer inspected by a tech.



Because our livelihood is dependent on technology, we have an automatic back-up system for all of our files and our thousands upon thousands of photos. If the whole shebang went kaput, we would be okay. There are lots of back-up systems available, but our favorite is Carbonite, which allows us to back-up all of our files on their servers. With our files backed-up off-site, our files are safe even if our office burns or our computers are stolen. For around \$60 a year per computer, you can back-up all of your work and there are no space limitations. We like Carbonite because the program uses small indicator "dots" to show what individual files have been saved (green dots) and ones that are scheduled for back up (yellow dots). The latter only occurs if you make a change to an existing file or add new files to your computer.

But our main message to you is a valuable lesson we learned (thank you, Mr. or Mrs. Hacker), and it has to do with passwords. Hence the "safety in numbers" title we used for this article. Hackers often use software programs that initially try to match actual words found in the dictionary against your passwords. For example, the password into our server was "fishsoul" after our *Chicken Soup for the Fisherman's Soul* book. Our password into one of our business accounts was "planettravel" and another one to our bank account was "orangesoup." Unbeknownst to us, we were very susceptible to hackers.

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Safety in Numbers

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According to both the computer tech and our server hosting company, if we use a password that is at least 13 characters long, a hacker's chance of discovering our password is near zero. The tech said it would likely take a hacker over 100 years to break the code. The key is to use a combination of upper and lower case letters, numbers and symbols. Using Dahlynn's name, we'll create an example of a great "unhackable" password:

D6a*h9L\$y2n)n

Look closely and Dahlynn's name can be found via every other letter. Be sure to capitalize at least two of the letters. And don't run letters together that spell a word or a partial word found in the dictionary (i.e., cow, dis, tree, pre) or a pattern of numbers (i.e., 12345). We urge you to make these changes immediately not only on your server—if you're running one—but also on your e-mail, bank accounts, Amazon accounts, anything in the virtual world that points to you and/or your identity.

Thanks for bearing with us this month, and we apologize for the tardiness of our e-newsletter. We consider you our colleagues and friends, so the information we share above is done with concern for you, your family and your writing career. Remember, there is safety in letters and symbols...and numbers.



Summer Memories Writing Prompt!

Last month's writing prompt was to pen a story of 500 words or less about a summer memory. Many entered, but only one is the winner: Dave from Chico, California. Dave wins a half-hour telephone writing/coaching session with us! You can read Dave's story on page 4.

Honorable mentions go out to Eliza Way, Toni Giarnese and R.E. Valenti. These three will receive our e-book *Wow #1: Seven Steps to Wow Publishers into Purchasing Your Nonfiction Stories*. Congratulations to everyone!

No Going Back

by Dave M. -- Chico, California

During my junior high school years, I spent my entire summer vacations with my best friends camping in the Sierra. John's grandparents were retired, so they parked their trailer beside Sly Creek and stayed all summer. We boys slept on the ground or in tents during rainstorms. This was primitive camping—no toilets (we dug our own). We had running water for drinking and cooking that we dipped out of the creek. There was no electricity, but just to confuse people, we ran a fake electrical cord from the back of the old ice box-style refrigerator to an equally fake electrical outlet stuck on a nearby tree.

Parents and families took turns coming up and camping for a week or two. But we boys stayed the entire summer, fishing, hiking, swimming and exploring. We even tried gold mining. We were forbidden to enter the nearby abandoned gold mines, but there was gold in the creek. The thrill of finding two dollars worth of gold after working from sun-up to sundown quickly waned.

We spent most of our time fishing. With the exception of a few holes, Sly Creek was never more than a couple of feet deep and fifteen feet wide. The only time our well-calloused feet saw the inside of shoes the entire summer was when wading the creek's slippery rocks and icy cold water catching fish.

Fishing was easy. Salmon eggs worked well. Fly fishing also worked, with no fly rod needed. We tied a Royal Coachman or mosquito onto our spinning rod line, whipped it back and forth a few times, dropped it into the current, then watched for a strike. We caught lots of fish—most days limits of ten trout each. They were small, maybe six inches long at most. There were no epic battles required to land these fish; we simply flicked our rod tips up and the fish came flying out onto the shoreline rocks. The *really* small ones we threw back.

Three days before returning home and starting high school, I was fishing alone. I drifted a fly under the overhanging and submerged roots of a small Douglas fir. As the fly disappeared into the darkness I felt a tug on my line. I flipped my rod tip upward, but the fish pulled it back. I repeated my typical fish-landing technique, but to no avail; this guy was not coming out. Moments later, after using my reel for the first time in years, I had a fat, 14-inch rainbow flopping on the rocks. I carefully unhooked the fly, admired the monster, then returned him to his way of life in Sly Creek.

Three days later I was sitting in class on my first day of high school thinking that my life, just like that giant trout I had caught a few days earlier, had changed forever. Unfortunately, there was nobody to toss me back into my earlier life of carefree fun. Adulthood and responsibility were knocking on my door.

HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF!

Chicken Soup for the Soul www.ChickenSoup.com

Teacher Tales: **Deadline: August 31, 2009**

NASCAR: **Deadline: August 31, 2009** **DEADLINE EXTENDED!**

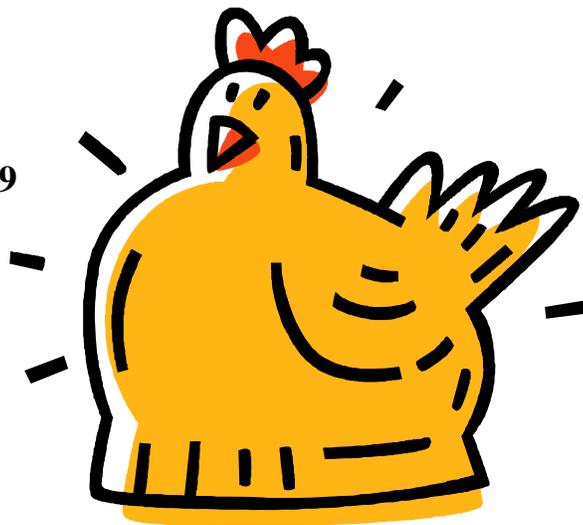
Endurance Sports: **Deadline: September 30, 2009**

Dieting and Fitness: **Deadline: September 30, 2009**

Mothers and Daughters: **Deadline: December 31, 2009**

Christmas and Holidays: **Deadline: January 15, 2010**

Grieving and Recovery: **Deadline: March 31, 2010**



NEW TITLES!



Grandmothers: **Deadline: March 31, 2010**



Grieving and Recovery for Dog Owners: **Deadline: March 31, 2010**



Grieving and Recovery for Cat Owners: **Deadline: March 31, 2010**



Cup of Comfort www.CupofComfort.com

For Couples: **Deadline: October 1, 2009**

For Golfers: **Deadline: December 15, 2009**

Go for it! Get published! 