

The  
Wow

# e-newsletter

by Ken and Dahlynn McKowen

Principles

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## A Strange Compulsion

by Ken McKowen



Dahlynn thinks me a bit odd because of a lifelong obsession: I love taking photographs of strange signs. Unfortunately, I'm often the only one who sees the humor in these little jewels of the English language. There is nearly always a tale behind each sign I've photographed—either a story about why I was there and how I discovered the sign or the story behind the sign itself.

Unfortunately, my photo filing system for these signs is essentially nonexistent. Usually, they are filed with whatever geographic region I was in when the photo was taken, so finding them is seldom easy (but in my defense, I snap upwards of 20,000 photos a year). Take, for instance, my "Onion Dip" sign. It's filed under North Coast (Redwoods) because that's where I photographed it. The story: Dahlynn and I were driving home from Oregon south on U.S. 101 when I convinced her (I was driving) that we should take the cut-off that skirts the south side of the Klamath River near its mouth

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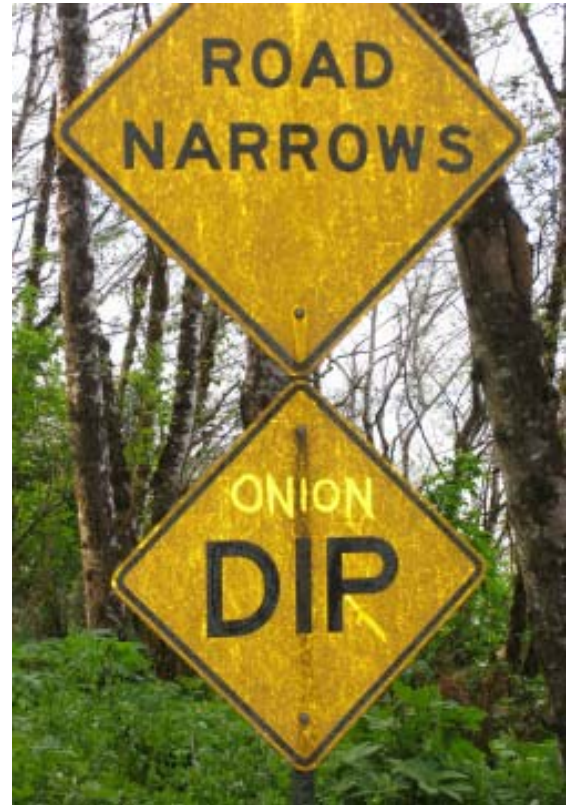


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## A Strange Compulsion

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then heads down along the coast into Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park. It's a narrow-seldom-paved-mostly-gravel-with-lots-of-bumps road, which, I learned on that fateful trip, is the kind of road that makes my wife's tummy upset. The coastal views were great, which I kept emphasizing as Dahlynn began to turn green. After many miles, she insisted I'd better find a cut-off back to the main highway or we would be reviewing her earlier breakfast. And it was at that very moment when I came upon the sign! It was a simple warning about a dip in the road, which in itself I found humorous considering the entire road was one continuous bumpy dip. But the real levity, for me, anyway, came from what someone had written in the dust on the sign—"Onion." Needless to say, Dahlynn didn't think the sign was funny at first due to her tummy ailment, which quickly and thankfully subsided once we got back to the highway.



You don't have to travel dirt roads to find fun and unusual signs. While driving between wineries researching our first wine book, the *Wine-Oh! Guide to the Sierra Foothills*, I spotted this deer sign. Dahlynn actually saw and appreciated the humor in this one. And I finally understood why there are so many road-kill deer in the California Sierra foothills!

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On another winery research trip, we happened upon a comical sign at Boeger Winery in Placerville, CA: Greg Boeger, family patriarch, was taking us on a private tour and when we passed the kids' sign. He laughed, saying it really worked!

Costa Rica is a wonderful place to visit. During one trip to a small town on the country's Pacific coastline, we spotted this digital services sign in a store's window. The sign did get its point across, and I'm reasonably certain that if I had attempted to write a similar sign in Spanish, my translation would have fared no better. And I would have gotten more than a few chuckles from Spanish-speaking tourists.



A few days ago, the family and I were driving home from the far northern reaches of the California coast, and in the town of Eureka, I spotted the paint sign. I quickly pulled into an adjacent parking lot and got out my camera, laughing to myself the entire time; I found it ironic that a paint company would have a major problem with peeling paint on the front of their business! Just as I went to click the shutter, a guy in an old Toyota pick-up pulled up in front of the

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building and parked. Gads! My first thought was that my shot was ruined, then I realized the rusted truck added to my photo's story! By the way, the paint store was out of business. Any guesses as to why?

I've also missed more than a few sign photo opportunities because I didn't have a camera with me. The one that sticks in my tiny brain was the night photo of an illuminated "Babies R Us" store sign. The "i" in "Babies" was burned out, making it "Babes R Us."



*Even though it's not funny, I still think this sign is fun.*

So what do I plan to do with all my sign photos? If I thought anyone would buy it, I would write vignettes for each photo and create a book (this type of book is called a "round-up," an easy story style we have discussed in earlier newsletters). Or I could post my photos on a blog about travel, along with captions or, again, vignettes...even though Dahlynn might not like the almost-puked story posted on-line for the world to read!

If you enjoy taking photos of items such as old cars, covered bridges, dilapidated barns, outhouses, historic dolls, antique fishing gear, or just about anything else, snap away and keep an updated file of all your finds. When you have enough, simply add words to your images and create a magazine article, something for your blog, or even a book. If you have an interest in a particular item, there are sure to be gobs of others who feel the same...even if one or two might feel otherwise!

**HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF!**

## *Summertime Blues...*

Summertime = no new story postings. This time of year, things really slow down for publishing houses as they try to wrap up their current projects. Unfortunately, there is nothing new to report, with the exception of some fast approaching July and August deadlines.

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### *Chicken Soup for the Soul*

[www.ChickenSoup.com](http://www.ChickenSoup.com)

**HURRY!** *New Moms: Deadline: July 31, 2010*

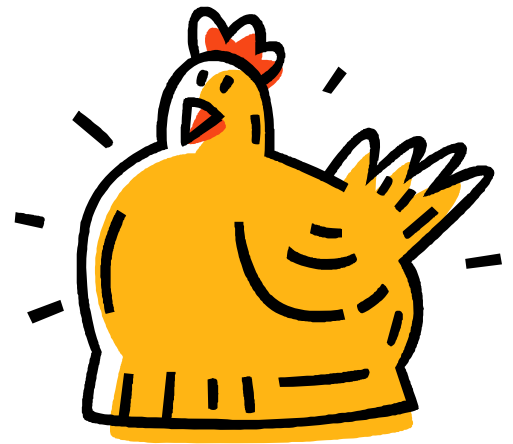
*Grandmothers: Deadline: August 31, 2010*

*Preteens: Deadline: August 31, 2010*

*Teens: Deadline: December 31, 2010*

*Young at Heart: Deadline: December 31, 2010*

*Mothers and Daughters: Deadline: December 31, 2010*



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### *A Cup of Comfort*

[www.CupofComfort.com](http://www.CupofComfort.com)



*A Cup of Comfort for Christian Women*

**Deadline: August 15, 2010**

**Story Length:** 750 to 1500 words

**Submission Deadline:** August 15, 2010

**Finalist Notification:** August 20, 2010



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***Go for it! Get published!*** 