

The  
Wow

e-newsletter

by Ken and Dahlynn McKowen

Principles

Volume 7 No. 7 July 2011

# Making Your Screenplays Dance on the Page

*By Jennifer Martin*

Since January, I've been enrolled in an online screenwriting course which took me through 100 assignments in 180 days and covered every aspect of screenwriting—from generating high concept ideas with high marketability, to expressing character traits in dialogue, and creating incredible openings and endings. By the end of the class, I was proud of my accomplishment: a newly completed screenplay which wouldn't have come into existence without the guidance and wisdom of my teacher, Hal Croasmun, from ScreenwritingU.



Just about every afternoon I'd get an email from Hal containing a detailed explanation of the assignment, along with excerpts from movie scripts that demonstrated the techniques being taught. I'd let my subconscious mind percolate on the new information while I slept. Then, the next morning, I'd sit in my robe and work on my assignments, which could involve something as simple as analyzing the opening of a favorite movie or as challenging as writing a scene with subtext and posting it on the online forum that

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## Screenplays...

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I shared with my fellow classmates who came from everywhere, including Canada and New Zealand.

There were many strategies and techniques offered throughout this course, but I'd like to share five that made my screenplay dance on the page:



**Fascinating Core:** When you brainstorm seed ideas for your movie, you need to zero in on the one idea that fascinates you in a way that the others do not. Then, take a serious look at the fascinating core of that idea because that's what'll keep you passionate about your script. If it's fascinating to you, it'll be fascinating to a potential producer. Once you've analyzed your core concept, you can take it through a variety of formats and select the one that has the best marketability. For example, you might take your core idea and put it in an unusual setting, like a foreign country or another planet. You could even change the

main characters from humans to animals. It's really fun to stretch your imagination and to see how your original idea can morph into something unique and compelling.

**Great Openings:** Try writing several kinds of openings for your script before you choose the one that is the most unique and fascinating. Types of openings can include a shocking one like *Basic Instinct*, which demonstrates how vicious an antagonist can be, or a trick opening, like *Silence of the Lambs*, which shows Clarice Starling, played by Jodie Foster, shooting a killer pretending to be a hostage, only to reveal that it was an FBI training exercise, not a real killing. If it has a slow start or no main characters are introduced in the first three pages, and doesn't evoke any kind of emotion on the first page, chances are your script is history. It's better to stick to the basic structure of great openings—a provocative opening on the first page, a twist on the third page, and the inciting incident on the fifth page through the tenth page. That's what sells in Hollywood.



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## Screenplays...

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**Dialogue:** Like visuals, music, and character, dialogue is a screenwriting tool. You want to select words that have the most impact. Dialogue involves either setting something up, paying something off, highlighting something that needs to be in the foreground, or accomplishing a number of other purposes. If it isn't meeting a purpose, it doesn't belong in the script. Remember, every character has a world view that influences his or her dialogue. This world view includes life metaphors, rules and strategies, and justifications. A metaphor that someone may operate out of could be as simple as "a knight in shining armor" or "the life of the party." Dialogue that expresses your character's world view will definitely punch up your script.

**Subtext:** Robert McKee (author of *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*) says that subtext is "life under the surface." It really refers to the deeper meaning in your dialogue, actions, characters, scene, and plot. Subtext allows the audience to take an internal journey through the movie, experiencing what the characters experience. To generate subtext, you could start with plot ideas and add unique characters, like a fish out of water or someone who hides who they are. Or you could start with your characters and try out plot ideas, like dramatic irony or a metamorphosis, to see what works best.



*...and the last great strategy...*



**Great Endings:** The most important thing about a great ending is that it must be surprising, inevitable, and meaningful. If there is no surprise, the ending is dull. If it isn't inevitable, it's not satisfying. And the ending should be so full of meaning that every event is personal for the audience. A great ending must be

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## Screenplays...

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carefully set up if the payoff to the audience is going to be a powerful one. Once you've completed your script, make an effort to elevate the ending, then go back through your script to make sure the setups are in place to make that ending work.

If you want to take your screenwriting to a higher level, I highly recommend any of the courses offered at ScreenwritingU. Sign up at [www.screenwritingu.com](http://www.screenwritingu.com). It'll open up a whole new world of writing just for you!



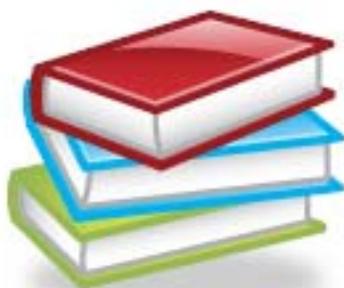
### **Jennifer Martin**



Four-time national screenwriting award winner Jennifer Martin has an interesting and lively background when it comes to show business. From being a regular on *American Bandstand* to hosting a *Travel Network* television show to being cast in, and helping cast, many Hollywood movies, Jennifer has experienced this industry from nearly every angle. To read her full bio—which includes info on her writing background and new screenwriting projects—visit her website at [www.HunaWarrior.com](http://www.HunaWarrior.com) and click on “About the Author.”

### **Don't Forget!**

For more years than we can count, we have been guest authors at the California State Fair's Author Booth. We had such great fun in the past that this year we purchased premium commercial booth space for the fair. We'll be selling our travel, winery and *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books the entire run of the fair and will also host several other known authors and their books, including Jennifer Martin, this month's guest columnist. Please come by and see us!



**Where:** California State Fair, Building C

**When:** July 14<sup>th</sup> through July 31<sup>st</sup>

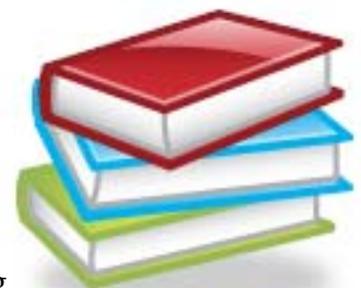
**Hours for Building C:**

Monday-Thursday, 12 noon to 10 p.m.

Friday-Sunday, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

**Cost:** State Fair entrance and parking fees

**More info about the fair:** [www.bigfun.org](http://www.bigfun.org)



# The Wow Principles e-newsletter

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

As of July 10, 2011

*Note: considering we released June's newsletter the end of June, there have been no changes regarding story call-outs. But we'll have lots of new ones in August's newsletter. -- D and K*



Lyndsey

## My Story is Out: High School Years

by Lyndsey D'Arcangelo

*The nation's newest anthology series for the LGBT community!*

Wow! We're excited about our newest anthology series, one that will help LGBT teens. Go to [www.MyStoryIsOut.com](http://www.MyStoryIsOut.com) for more information and submission guidelines. Deadline: 1/1/12 (Publisher: Publishing Syndicate)

# Dream of Things<sup>SM</sup>

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

(Find story information under the "Workshop" tab.)

*Coffee Shop Stories*

*Travel Stories*

*Holiday Stories*

*Stories about*

*Stories of Forgiveness*

*Great Teachers*

*Advice You'd Like to Pass On to Others*

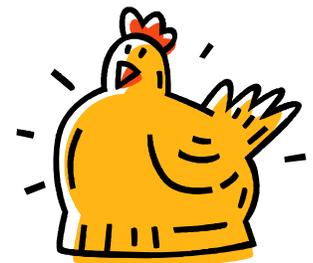
All *Dream of Things* anthology call-outs are open until there are enough stories to fill a book.

*Making Waves: Stories about Role Models and People Who Inspire and Motivate Us*

## Chicken Soup for the Soul

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

*Chicken Soup for the Soul* has LOTS of great writing opportunities, too many to list here. Check out their website to learn more!



**Go for it! Get published!** 

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

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