

The Wow Principles

e-newsletter

by Ken and Dahlynn McKowen

Volume 10 No. 3 March 2014

If You Ain't Got That Jive

By Terri Elders

After reading an e-mail from a 13-year-old fan, I squealed with joy. I'd touched somebody's heart! She'd read one of my published stories and wrote, "I have to say that even though it was short, I loved it because there was so much emotion in it; so much feeling. I really want to become a writer, but I lack emotion. My stories are entertaining, but dull at the same time. I would really, really, REALLY, be happy if you could give me some advice on how to put emotion into a story."

I answered her right away because she'd made me giddy as a golfer snagging a hole-in-one, as blissful as a bridesmaid bagging the bouquet, as jubilant as—well, you finish the simile, because you get the picture.

In my response I related that as a teen, when I attended high school in Los Angeles, I joined a science fiction and fantasy club, and absorbed a lot of Ray Bradbury's stories. Once he visited us, and I've always remembered how he discussed emotion. Bradbury claimed that the emotional anchors everything in art. "This is the emotional thing, you see—you must galvanize people, so they want to be completely alive and live forever, or the next thing to it. And out of that comes art, then, and survival through emotion." (1)

(1) <http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2013/08/22/ray-bradbury-day-at-night-1974-interview/>

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Come April, we will be announcing a new NYMB title! More info in next month's *Wow Principles*.



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If You Ain't Got That Jive

Here are some ways I edit my own work to jazz it up when it ain't got that swing:



1. **Paint pictures.** Don't settle for such ordinary words as "he felt happy." The basic emotions are happy, sad, scared, mad and surprised. What does your character feel and how can you show that? Don't flinch at passion—be bold. Here's your chance to be the drama queen (or king) you've always aspired to. Jump the shark! Pretend your character is Gloria Swanson, ready for her close-up in *Sunset Boulevard*. Want subtlety instead? Show us Robert Redford's nuanced performance in *All is Lost*, or Cary Grant in absolutely anything.

2. **Get physical.** How do your characters react? Help your readers see, hear, smell, taste and touch. Show physical reactions, not just facial expressions (grimaces, frowns, wrinkling brows), but gestures and motions (clapping a hand over mouth, covering eyes, running away). Convey your feelings through your senses and your setting. How does your character react to the cinnamony scent of a baking apple pie? Is he startled by a robin's song? Does she rejoice if she sees a frog hop or a snake slither across her path? Be sensual. Your character can stumble back, stride forwards, slam a fist, grab a forearm, scratch one's head, wipe a tear or stomp a foot.



3. **Cautiously cudgel clichés, but vigorously bludgeon bromides.** Julia Cresswell, the author of *The Cat's Pajamas: The Penguin Book of Clichés*, cautions that "while clichés may be poor style they are efficient forms of communication." Just don't rely on them obsessively. Clichés, like all shortcuts, have their perfectly good uses. Bromides, though, are trite and unoriginal and will bore readers. While you're at it, shun stereotypes. For example, you don't have to show a happy character gamboling through a dell on a spring morning. A person can feel joy even while ensconced in a gray-walled prison cell, should she learn she's been granted a reprieve. Forest Lawn cemetery might be one of the most beautiful settings in Los Angeles, but I'd feel no urge to frolic there were I grieving at a close friend's funeral.

If You Ain't Got That Jive

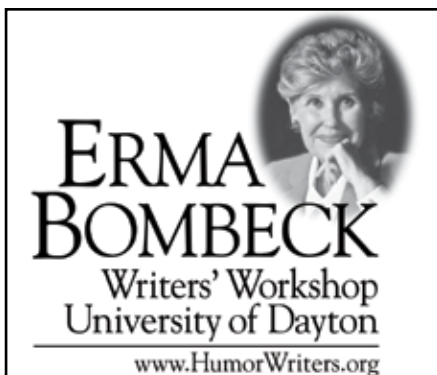


4. Kill the clutter and watch your words. Punctuating your prose with “very,” “extremely” and “really” will weaken, not strengthen, a sentence and its impact. If you can delete a word, do. Write tight when you need to. In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald doesn't waste a word. Read this American classic to see how he does it. Remember, pithy Anglo-Saxon words sound better and more emotional than polysyllabic Latin ones. Short sentences create tension and add urgency, but vary sentence structure to avoid monotony. *Embrace* action verbs and annihilate passive constructions.

5. Or...surprise your reader. You ain't alive if you ain't got that jive! Go for the unexpected. Metaphors, hyperbole and similes add color to dull writing. Don't be afraid to exaggerate. Forget apples and oranges; compare the incomparable. Mark Twain did it here: “The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter—it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.” Or, if you've got some wiggle room, borrow from Dickens. He liked to make “a pretty piece of writing.” His descriptions often present people, their surroundings, and even the weather, in ways which reinforce each other, so he builds an emotion through the passage. Want your setting to mirror your character's emotions? Notice how the descriptions in the opening pages of Daphne duMaurier's *Rebecca* reflect a sense of loss.



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I am so excited about the upcoming Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop, April 10-12, in Dayton, Ohio. As a faculty member, I will be giving two workshops, both entitled “The Psychology of the Anthology.”

Also attending are NYMB co-creators Laurel McHargue (*Stupid Kids*), Kathy Baker (*Dogs*), Terri Elders (*Travel*), Pat Nelson (*Parent*), Pamela Frost (*Home Improvement*), Terri Spilman (*Dieting*) and Stacey Hatton (*Menopause*), plus many of you! EBWW is hosting a book-signing event on Friday night: myself and the CCs will be signing books like crazy!

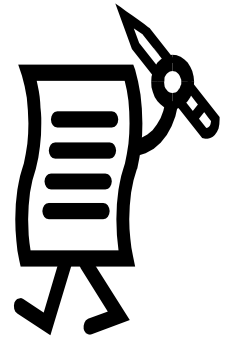
Follow the conference and our adventures via Twitter at two hashtags: #ebww2014 and #NYMB.

~~ Dahlynn

If You Ain't Got That Jive

Lastly, here's some suggested rules on how to avoid being stale from George Orwell, from his essay *Politics and the English Language*:

1. Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.



Ready, set, **edit!**

Resources for Describing Feelings

- <http://www.wikihow.com/Add-Emotion-to-a-Story>
- <http://avajae.blogspot.com/2013/10/how-to-write-emotion-effectively.html>
- <http://www.psychpage.com/learning/library/assess/feelings.html>
- <http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/parts-of-speech/adjectives/list-of-adjectives-to-describe-tone-feelings-emotions.html>

Terri Elders, LCSW, lives near Colville, WA. In 2007, Ken and Dahlynn McKowen included her first anthology submission, "Easter Bloomers," in *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Celebrating Brothers and Sisters*. She co-edited *Not Your Mother's Book. . . On Travel*. She'll attend the April 2014 Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop in Dayton, OH, with others of the NYMB team. Terri blogs at <http://atouchoftarragon.blogspot.com/>.

Terri visiting the Charles Dickens Museum in London, England (2013)



SEND IN YOUR STORIES!

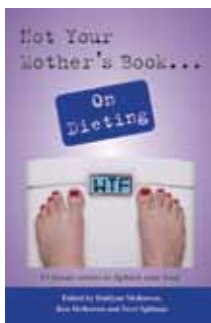
Updated 3/22/14

Not Your Mother's Book . . .

A new anthology for a new century!

Stories needed for 30+ new books. Must be written by people age 18 and older. Details and submission guidelines are on the PS website.

UPCOMING DEADLINES

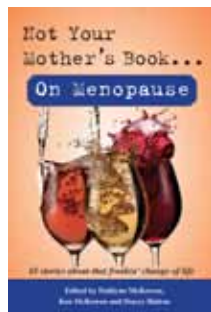


On Dieting: May 1, 2014



On Military Life:

June 1, 2014



On Menopause:

September 1, 2014

Submission guidelines at
www.PublishingSyndicate.com

OMG! My Reality! Youth Series

Time to get published!

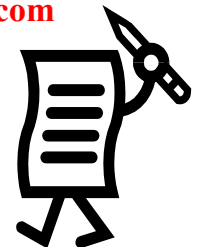
We are accepting stories for three *OMG! My Reality!* titles: *Kids*; *Preteens*; and *Teens*. Stories must be written by those age 25 and younger. Please share this information with everyone. Thanks!



Do you know a teenager who loves to write? Tell him/her to submit stories to the upcoming *OMG! My Reality! For Teens*. **Being a published author is great for college and job applications.** With the fall 2013 release of *Stand Up!*, an anthology with stories from 75 of the nation's and world's most amazing young activists, we'll be swamped with even more submissions. So don't delay! Send now!

www.PublishingSyndicate.com

Help young people become published authors!



My Story is Out: High School Years

Created by Lyndsey D'Arcangelo

The nation's newest anthology for LGBT teens!

We are looking for humorous, heart-warming, wistful and inspiring stories written by straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals **of all ages** about high school life. More info at www.MyStoryIsOut.com.