

The
Wow

e-newsletter

by Ken and Dahlynn McKowen

Principles

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In 'Toon with Jonny Hawkins

Earlier this month, we spent two weeks in the Great Lakes region and Ontario, Canada, touring myriad historical sites for our travel website PlacesToDiscover.com. During our trip, we had breakfast one morning at IHOP near Kalamazoo, Michigan, with freelance cartoonist Jonny Hawkins, who lives an hour southeast. Having never met before in person, but having worked closely together on many Chicken Soup books and the *Wow Principles* e-newsletter for almost a decade, the three of us had a great visit. We also interviewed him for October's issue.



Jonny and Dahlynn at IHOP

A little about Jonny: he's created 27,000 single-panel cartoons thus far and has sold his work to *Women's World*, *Barron's* and *Reader's Digest*. His cartoons have appeared in 65 *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books and every year, he releases cartoon books and several desk calendars (imagine having to draw 365 new cartoons for each calendar). A fulltime cartoonist, Jonny credits his success to the love and support of his three kids—all under the age of ten—and his wife Carrissa.

Jonny has been drawing for Publishing Syndicate for years. Because many of you are artists and cartoonists, and also because we haven't discussed this topic in any of our past 46 newsletters, we were happy Jonny agreed to an interview.

How did you get started in cartooning?

I began cartooning while attending a small Bible college in the Detroit area. I'd been doing cartoons for the college's library—on things like how to use the card catalog, caricatures of the professors—when someone said I should send my cartoons to a magazine he had been reading. It was a publication for pastors. So I did. Then I started sending

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cartoons to various places, but I got rejected hundreds of times. Finally, in 1986, I sent one to a literary publisher of Sunday school take-home papers for churches—and they bought it for \$15. I was elated. I couldn't believe someone would pay me to draw a cartoon. I obtained my associate degree then took art classes at a community college—I wanted to get better at perspective in my artwork.

[After college], a friend dared me to do caricatures at a local festival. I didn't think I could do it because I had a fear of drawing in front of people. I remember drawing a couple in pencil; it took me an hour to draw their caricature! It was difficult trying to bring out their personalities. I was completely out of my comfort zone, but it was good because it got me started. And although I did only eight caricatures in twelve hours that day, I got paid! Since then, I've probably drawn more than 10,000 caricatures.

Did you continue with your cartoon submissions while drawing caricatures?

Yes. In 1990, I was single, living in an apartment in Detroit. I was doing shows (caricatures) and sending cartoons to magazines—*Saturday Evening Post*, *National Enquirer*. The first year I had three sales; the second year, three sales; one year, I had one sale. And I was getting all of these rejections. One rookie mistake I made was sending out originals; you never send your originals. I must have lost a couple hundred that never came back.

From there, I started hitting church publications. I had a niche because my dad was a pastor, so I had an inside view of church doings. I sent cartoons to the *Leadership Journal* and they have been a regular client now for over 20 years. Then I started selling to mainstream magazines. I also sent batches of cartoons to *Women's World* eight times a year for 12 years...before they bought one cartoon.

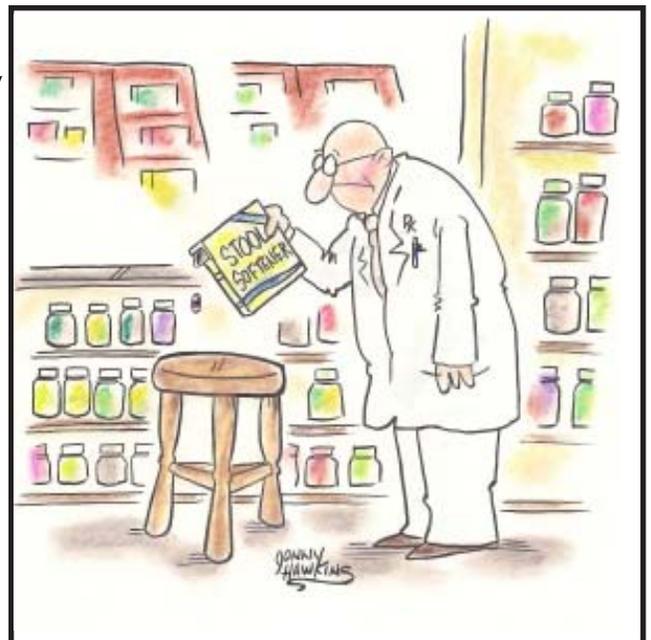
How did you get involved with Chicken Soup?

My brother had a *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book and I saw they used cartoons. I sent single-panel cartoons to the publisher, but they didn't use anything. It took a lot of follow-up submissions, but they finally bought three cartoons. They paid \$300 for each cartoon back then. I've been in 65 titles since.

How do you come up with your ideas?

I don't have one particular format. I'm an A.D.D. cartoonist because my attention span is two seconds! That's probably why I'm a single-panel cartoonist; I want to get a cartoon done quickly then move on to the next.

I'll come up with a word, catch-phrase, topic, or buzzword that ties to a subject then draw a few ideas. Most of the time, I can take one term and marry it to another.



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In 'Toon with Jonny Hawkins

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I like playing with words, their meanings...[thinking]...like drawing a frog hopping into an IHOP!

What advice do you have for budding cartoonists?

I've always been for chasing your dream, because that's what I did. It is of the utmost importance to love what you do and if you are passionate about it, you will find a way to succeed. You can interview hundreds of us freelance cartoonists and each will tell a different story, our paths having their own unique twists and dips. But the key is passion and persistence—never giving up and never getting so discouraged that you stop believing in yourself. My faith in God is also personally very important to me and I believe a key to any success I have.

There are lots of different avenues for cartoonists these days. I would say to just draw, develop a style that's fairly consistent, and develop your sense of humor. It takes a while before your sense of humor is discernable enough—mature enough—to put together cartoons consistently. Practice over and over.



When it comes to Jonny's writing cartoons, this is one of our favorites! Got Oprah?

What about the business aspects of cartooning?

As far as the business end, take some college business classes if you're going to do this as a freelancer. Today's cartoonists are going to sell a lot on the Internet, so the Internet is the way to go. I sell cartoons through several agencies—www.cartoonstock.com is the main one. I put close to 1,000 cartoons on that site, and every month they send me a statement [and/or check]. They are out of London and sell cartoons all over the world, representing about 300 cartoonists.

You didn't mention syndication.

Syndication is probably the least likely way to become a cartoonist. Syndicated, you might get into 50 to 100 newspapers. If you get into 100, that would be pretty good income if you can maintain that, but the fate of the newspaper industry right now doesn't seem all that stable.

However, your comic can be distributed on-line. Plus, all the major syndicates have their websites and sell to and through various search engines and portals. I don't know how that works as to how they get paid, but I'm sure it's decent.

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*The Hawkins Family: (left to right)
Zachary, mom Carissa, Nathaniel,
dad Jonny and Kara*

Flash forward: You have a family now. How has this changed your career?

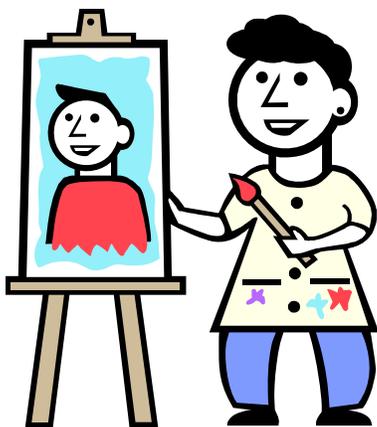
I do have a family, so it makes me more disciplined. I struggle with self-discipline; in order to crank out the work and get my projects done, I have to set hard deadlines (especially when doing calendars). Having a family makes me focus—I've got to provide for these people who are all relying on me.

Do your kids provide inspiration?

Absolutely. For example, my son came to me—I think he was three years old—and showed me a crayon that had broken. He said, "Dad, my crayon needs new batteries." That's precious, so I did a cartoon with a mom in the picture instead and it sold to *Woman's World* for \$125.

How does Carrissa get involved and what does she think of your sense of humor?

(Laughing hard) Carrissa, she's great; she's my CFO. She handles the bills, which is probably the most stressful. She would prefer [my doing] something a little more secure, I think, where we get a check every Friday. But she's got a good sense of humor. It's different than mine... obviously, she had to have a sense of humor to marry me.



What do you see for your future?

I would like to affect the world in a positive way with my pen... and career. If I can lift a lowered chin even for a moment, or add a "grinsight" (a nugget of truth that brings a smile) that allows one to see a problem through the lens of humor, then it is a worthwhile effort!

Jonny would love to hear from you, especially if you have more questions about cartooning or want to hire him for your special project! You can e-mail him at jonnyhawkins2nz@yahoo.com.



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

Chicken Soup for the Soul www.ChickenSoup.com

Endurance Sports: Deadline: November 30, 2009 **Deadline Extended!**

Mothers and Daughters: Deadline: December 31, 2009

Christmas and Holidays: Deadline: January 15, 2010

Dieting and Fitness: Deadline: January 31, 2010 **Deadline Extended!**



New Moms: Deadline: February 28, 2010

Grandmothers: Deadline: March 31, 2010

Grieving and Recovery: Deadline: March 31, 2010

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

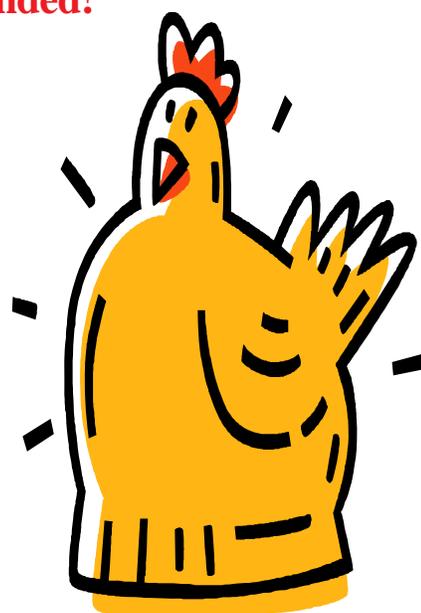
Grieving and Recovery for Cat Owners: Deadline: March 31, 2010



Preteens: Deadline: March 31, 2010



Teens: Deadline: March 31, 2010



Cup of Comfort www.CupofComfort.com

For Golfers: Deadline: December 15, 2009

Don't dismay — new titles will be posted soon!

Go for it! Get published! 