

The
Wow

e-newsletter

by Ken and Dahlynn McKowen

Principles

Volume 3 No. 10 October 2007

Learning from the King

In keeping with the spirit of October, our main article for this month will feature the master of horror writing, Stephen King.

First and foremost, I have to admit that I don't read books that often. I write, read story submissions, and edit manuscripts all day long, so when it comes to sitting down and reading "a good book," that's the last thing on my agenda.

But I have to admit that when I found Stephen King's paperback "Stephen King On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft" (Pocket Books, 2000) at a used bookstore, I was intrigued. Here was one of the most successful writers of our time sharing his thoughts about writing. I couldn't resist, so I bought it for \$1.50. It was one of the best purchases I have made this entire year, bar none (maybe with the exception of an adorable ceramic bobble-head green cow I just had to have when I was in Salt Lake City last month!).

As soon as I opened the book, I was glued to King's every word. He sucked me in and spit me out on the other side a more enlightened writer. I've been in this business for twenty years, and I learned things that just blew me away. Now for those of you who aren't writers, you may have a different view, but to me, it was worth every free moment of my already crammed schedule. I just couldn't put it down.

Quick synopsis: King starts with *three* forwards. Yes, three. My favorite is the second forward—please fill in the blanks as you deem appropriate:

This is a short book because most books about writing are filled with b _____. Fiction writers, present company included, don't understand very much about what they do—not why it works when it's good, not why it doesn't when it's bad. I figured the shorter the book, the less the b _____.

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Learning from the King

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King continues in this vein, from his writing beginnings to his failures to his great success, and he sprinkles the book with his vision of what makes a great story. And what's great about this is that his advice can be applied to both fiction and nonfiction. He finishes with an actual edited version, with handwritten notations, of one of his books.

I'm going to include some of King's tips in this article, but you really need to read the book to gain a full understanding of his writing wisdom. We have it available for purchase via our Amazon affiliate link on our webpage. It's only \$7.99, which is a steal, unless you can find it for \$1.50!

Tips from the king of fiction (keep in mind that the quotes below may reference fiction writing, but can be applied to all styles of writing):

- Stephen King (pp. 200-201): "When you write a book, you spend day after day scanning and identifying the trees. When you're done, you have to step back and look at the forest."

This is true of all writing and comes down to editing. Get your thoughts and story on paper—everything—then start to thin. King has a unique way he "thins" or creates second drafts of his novels:

- King (pp. 224-226): "In the spring of my senior year at Lisbon High...1966...I got a scribbled comment that changed the way I rewrote my fiction once and forever. Jotted below the machine-generated signature of the editor was this... 'Not bad, but PUFFY. You need to revise for length. Formula: 2nd Draft = 1st Draft – 10%. Good luck.'"

Without a doubt, the above editing formula has proven highly successful for King through the years, and it can work for your writing, too. For those of us not good with numbers, if you create a 60,000 word first draft, then calculate ten percent, which is 6,000 words, and start cutting. King adds, "If you can't get out ten percent of it while retaining the basic story and flavor, then you're not trying very hard."

- King (pg. 220): "Call that one person that you write for [the] Ideal Reader."

King explains that the Ideal Reader is the person you know who will read your first draft, so have them in your mind at all times as you create your manuscript.

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Learning from the King

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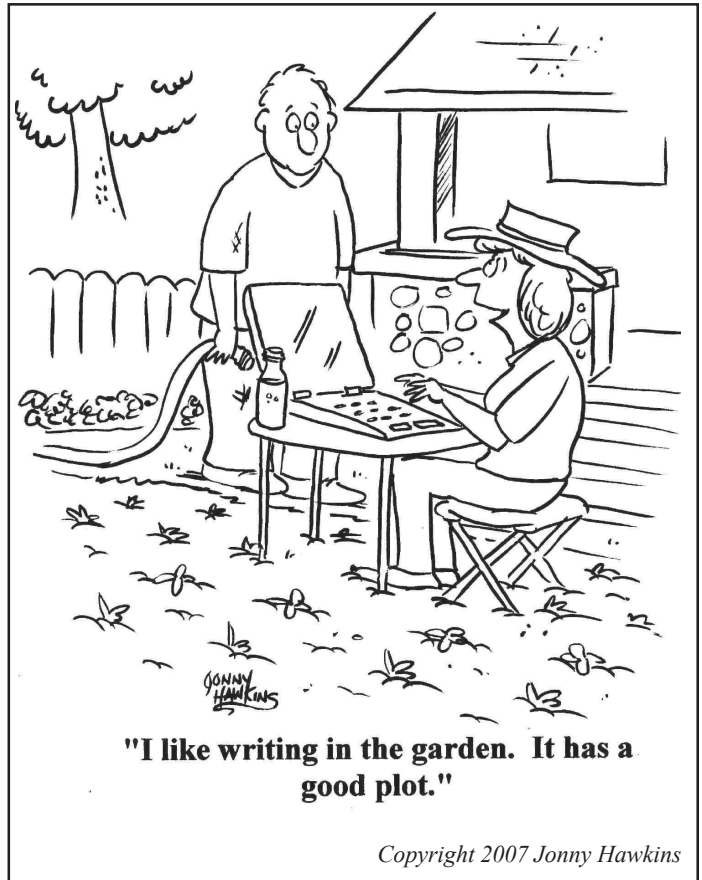
- King (pg. 221): "I.R. will help you get outside yourself...to actually read your work in progress as an audience would while you're working. This is perhaps the best way of all to make sure you stick to story..."

King uses many examples of Ideal Reader through the book. My Ideal Reader is Ken, and I'm his; he's in my head when I write. This forces me to make sure my ideas and storylines are clear, my back story is concise, and the flow is not too forced. He also adds comedy to my writing, as I'm not funny...I'm usually the only one who laughs at my jokes!

Again, the above just scratches the surface of what you will find in this funny, gracious and, for a writer, inspiring book. King's sage advice of the publishing industry is worth the cost alone. I highly recommend this book to novice, experienced and professional writers. Again, you can order it via our Amazon link at our website, or from any other book seller or on-line retailer. Enjoy and become inspired!



-- Dahlynn



"I like writing in the garden. It has a good plot."

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Who Said This? (answer on page 4)

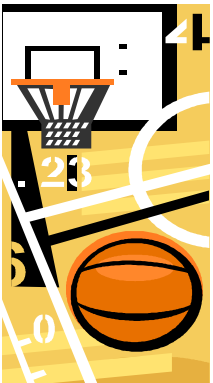
Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.

THE HOLIDAYS ARE JUST AROUND THE CORNER which means magazines are now planning their late spring/summer issues. We'll talk about pitching story ideas to magazines in November's issue, and the art of a great query letter/e-mail. If you're serious about breaking into the magazine genre, then it's important you have access to the 2008 *Writer's Market*. The book was discussed in length in our July 2007 e-newsletter—back issues are available on our website. You can purchase the book via our Amazon affiliate link on our website, too.

HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF!

The following Chicken Soup books need stories from you!

IMPORTANT: Please submit stories for the following books to www.ChickenSoup.com, not to Publishing Syndicate. Thanks.



Basketball Lover's Soul: We have heard from Chicken Soup that they are in need of basketball stories that aren't "dated." Most of the stories they are receiving are set back many, many decades ago--some almost a half century ago--but they need more "current" stories, too.

Book description: Stories of inspiration and resilience from basketball players and from the fans who love basketball. Deadline: December 31, 2007



Life's Most Embarrassing Moments: We have all been involved in embarrassing situations. This collection of funny and upbeat true stories will make you realize that it's okay to laugh at yourself! Deadline: December 31, 2007



Baking With Kids: A collection of stories and recipes that bring back fond memories and experiences of the baking experiences you had as a young child. Deadline: December 31, 2007

Runner's Soul: Many people enjoy running. They find it to be an energizing and rewarding experience. The stories in this book will give us an insight into the runner's soul.

Deadline: December 31, 2007

Stay-At-Home Mom's Soul: Being a stay at home mom is one of the most difficult jobs but also one of the most rewarding. Deadline: February 29, 2008

Go for it! Get published!



Answer:
Mark Twain