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Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop

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Insights, Laughter and Lessons Learned

Amber Shaw

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Insights, Laughter and Lessons Learned

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Friday April 19, 2024

By Amber Shaw

I've been home from the Erma Bombeck Writer's Workshop for a week.

My dog is still a little upset with me that she is no longer dining on the good dishes. Apparently, I hid her dog bowls in the dishwasher while I was away.

The Erma Magic is still strong. I'm staying in touch with people I've met. I'm reading books, blogs, and essays written by my new friends. My reading list grew exponentially and will likely get me through to the next Erma Workshop. I've started writing my next book. I'm bursting with confidence, inspiration, and knowledge that has rubbed off on me.

This was my second Erma Workshop. I spent the first Workshop I attended in 2022 feeling alternately terrified and elated, jet-lagged and high on sugar, inspired and intimidated. I laughed and I cried. And then I couldn't wait to come back. This time, as an old pro, I cheerfully greeted everyone with a first-timer badge, had my money ready to buy a country-club pour of Merlot for myself and someone else who didn't bring cash, and was much more open to relaxing and socializing. I met more people and learned some valuable things from my fellow attendees.

A few things I learned from my fellow attendees:

Burlesque performance is a viable side gig for a writer, as is being a federal bankruptcy judge.

A person can be bipetual, writing and publishing a prolific number of books about cats while living with a dog.

You can bring boxed wine into a hotel bar and not get kicked out.

You can retire from being a stay-at-home mom.

So many writers wear fabulous, colorful glasses and have never heard of clothing-rental subscriptions.

The community is so generous that if you drop a stitch on your flight to Dayton, a fellow writer/knitter will help you find it.

From the speakers, both professional and not, I learned:

Wear the sequins!

Wear a giant pink martini on your shirt. Wear fishnets and a miniskirt.

Most of all, be yourself, be brave and get up there. Not that I got up to read or perform, because I'm not that brave (yet).

Writers can sing all the words to "Delta Dawn" without any rehearsal.

Every speaker, from each time slot and during each meal, had something wise and funny to share that I needed to hear.

Here are a few gems from the coherent parts of my notes from various workshops:

Don't care what other people think about your writing.

Get yourself in funny situations so you can write about them.

Don't get in your own way.

Pay attention to your strong feelings.

Pay attention to your author page on Amazon.

Access your memories and deeper feelings by writing from a prompt *because our brain works sideways*, and the prompt may open a door to the subconscious.

(Insert a page of triangle sketches, one of them 3D)

Think about inventing a way to split yourself to go to every one of the workshops.

Sign up for the next Erma Workshop in 2026.

Don't go on a dog bowl cleaning frenzy before leaving town.

—Amber Shaw

Amber McClain Shaw is a writer, artist, enthusiastic home chef, runner, and author of the books *If I Knew I Was Going to Have Three Boys, I Would Have Paid More Attention in PE, Volumes 1 and 2*.