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Laughing Matters

John Branning

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Thursday April 11, 2024

Laughing Matters

By John Branning

I recently had the pleasure of attending my second Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop (abbreviated as EBWW). It's held every other year in her hometown of Dayton, Ohio, drawing attendees from all across the United States and also other countries, such as Canada,

Spain, and Alaska.

Now, right off the bat, I can tell you this event is badly misnamed. Yes, they've got the "Erma Bombeck" part right, but it really should be billed as the "Erma Bombeck Writing, Drinking, Eating, and Staying Up Too Late Laughing Workshop." I did much less writing during the conference than any of those other activities.

But just in case the IRS reads this after I attempt to write off my travel expenses, program costs, and bar tab — there were legitimate educational opportunities throughout the two-and-a-half days spent otherwise eating, drinking, etc. In fact, one of the first things I learned about was something called a "hermit crab essay." I knew that hermit crabs were resourceful creatures, what with their ability to acquire living quarters via eminent domain, but I was surprised to hear about their writing abilities.

I later discovered I may have misunderstood the concept, probably because I had Stayed Up Too Late the night before, catching up with old friends from prior attendance while bonding with new friends over Drinking.

Another important insight gleaned from the workshop was how important sweets are to a balanced diet. Pastries at breakfast, cookies at lunch, famous Ohio "Buckeyes" and more cookies and pastries for afternoon snacks, and a lovely slice of cake already laid out at dinner alongside the salad course, with a full glass of wine making a swift appearance. I would estimate at least 99% of the attendees took at least one bite of cake along with their salad. I don't know whether Miss Manners would consider that to be a social faux pas, but when it comes to mealtime comportment I prefer to follow the advice of Marie Antoinette, who famously exclaimed, "Let them eat cake!" She also said, "There is nothing new except what has been forgotten," so, again: Drinking.

All in all, I was quite intoxicated... er, invigorated by the variety of session leaders, keynote speakers, and writing colleagues — both established and aspiring — with whom I got to mingle at this year's EBWDEaSUTLLW.

Gee, although perhaps more accurate, that expanded name I've provided for the workshop is quite a mouthful, isn't it? I think I'll retract it and go back to the simpler EBWW so I've got room to shovel in another generous slice of cake. Does anybody want to trade theirs for my salad? No??

—John Branning

John Branning is a Maine-based humor writer and two-time EBWW attendee who is trying to convince his family to serve wine and cake with every meal.