

May 23, 2017

Erma Bombeck Blog: 'This is not an emergency'

Maureen E. Schlangen, *University of Dayton*



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons CC_BY-NC-ND International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

UNIVERSITY of DAYTON

ERMA BOMBECK

Writers' Workshop



'This is not an emergency'



Seven years ago, I bought a terrific grill, the Weber BabyQ.

"I am not comfortable with that name at all," my son Joe, then 11, said as he helped me assemble it. He

was right — they definitely should have focus-grouped that one.

It was the perfect grill for me. It had the most wonderful cast-iron cooking surface. Smaller than a turkey roaster, it was compact enough to port in and out of the garage of the 750-square-foot apartment we lived in at the time, and because it used those camp-sized propane canisters you can buy at the grocery, I never had to carry a full-size tank home in the car, praying the entire time I wouldn't get rear-ended and blow up an entire city block.

A couple of weeks ago, I grilled some chicken breasts on it. When I took them off the grill and turned off the gas, however, the fire kept on burning.

"No problem," I thought. "I'll just close the lid, and it will go out."

A few minutes later, when I went back outside to put the grill away, it was a blazing inferno. Flames were licking out the sides and reflecting bright orange in the drip pan underneath it.

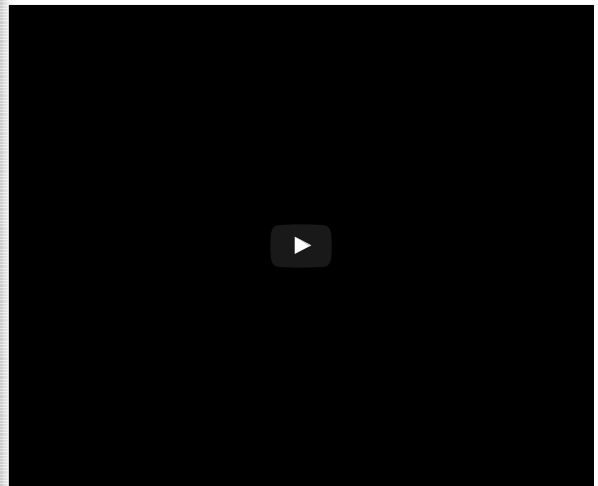
My mind raced. What should I do? As much trouble as my house has been, I did not want it to burn down. I had to act fast.

The first order of business was to carefully disconnect the gas canister, which I was able to do.

Next, I needed to put the fire out. I went inside for a large glass of water — but on the way back out, I stopped myself. This was clearly a grease fire. Everyone knows you don't put water on a grease fire.

But what *do* you put on a grease fire?

Reflections of Erma



Humor writer of the month

Dawn Weber



Dawn Weber is a national award-winning humor columnist (NSNC, 2011), *Huffington Post* contributor and author whose work has been published in five anthologies and a new humor book, *I Love You. Now Go Away: Confessions of a Woman with a Smartphone*. She writes at

Subscribe to our Newsletter

Facebook Friends



Erma B...
6.8K likes

a Bombeck

[Like Page](#)

Be the first of your friends to like this



Erma Tweets

I searched my memory to those times we learned about fire safety in elementary school and Girl Scouts. Suddenly, I pictured it in my mind.

"Flour," I thought. "You smother a grease fire with flour."

Which was perfect, really. I didn't have a fire extinguisher, but by golly, I had flour — five kinds of it. I was a little concerned that the cast-iron grate would block most of it from falling onto the fire ... but if I used enough, surely it would work.

Except I was wrong — in the heat of the moment, I'd forgotten the lesson I'd learned every single time I'd tried to bake brownies: FLOUR BURNS. It wasn't flour they used in that demonstration. It was baking soda. (This is no longer recommended, by the way.)

The problem was getting worse by the minute. The fire continued to rage, and thick smoke from the burning flour was now filling the neighborhood. It became one of those situations single people have from time to time, where you really wish you had someone there to help you, but you're sort of glad no one is there to witness it. The time had come to call for help.

Since this was clearly not an emergency (?), I did not dial 911. I looked up the regular number for the fire department. Of course, calls to this number ring directly to 911, because what fire isn't an emergency, and what city has a special dispatcher just for non-emergency fires?

"Oh, hi," I said casually. "This is not an emergency. My little grill is on fire, and I can't put it out. I tried flour, and that just made it worse. Can you tell me what I should do?"

"What's your address, ma'am?" the dispatcher asked. I gave it to her.

"I'll send someone out," she said. Seconds later, I heard the siren.

"Oh, my God ... that's for me," I thought to myself.

The fire department is approximately a 45-second drive from my house. And it wasn't just any siren. It was the hook-and-ladder. Several firefighters got out in full gear.

They almost seemed disappointed when they saw the BabyQ.

"We saw the smoke, and we could smell it all the way from the station," one said.

They didn't even need to use the fire extinguisher. Within a couple of minutes, the flames were going out on their own. They were really nice about the whole thing.

"I swear this won't happen again," I said, embarrassed. "Would you like some chicken?"

They didn't. I thanked them and promised to clean my next grill regularly.

I am now the proud owner of a terrific new grill, which I have used several times without incident. It's exactly like the old one ... except for the name. It's now called the Weber Q1000.

It goes great with my new fire extinguisher.

— Maureen Schlangen

Maureen Schlangen is a writer and editor in Kettering, Ohio.

the [Huffington Post](#) and on her blog, [Lighten Up](#). The *Buckeye Lake Beacon*, which published her "Lighten Up" column, calls her the local love child of Dave Barry and Nora Ephron.

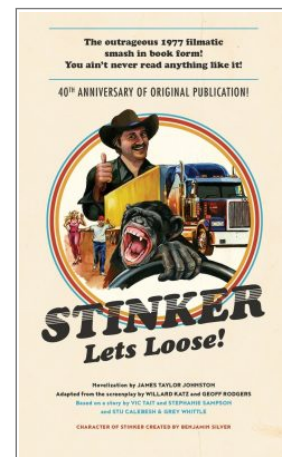
[See past winners](#)

If you'd like to be considered as our featured writer (or you read someone who should be), [send an e-mail](#) with a brief bio and a link to your Web site.

Like us on Facebook & follow us on Twitter! [Read More](#)

Who's publishing what?

Stinker

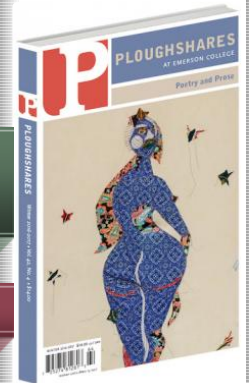


[Mike Sacks'](#) newest book, *Stinker Lets Loose!*, is described as "the outrageous 1977 filmatic smash in book form." A former writer for *The Washington Post*, he's currently part of the editorial staff of *Vanity Fair* magazine. He has written for *The New Yorker*, *Time*, *Esquire*, *Vanity Fair*, *GQ*, *Radar*, *Believer*, *Vice*, *Women's Health*, *Salon*, *Premiere*, *New York Observer*, *McSweeney's*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Cracked*, *MAD* and other publications. In addition, he has published four humor books: *And Here's the Kicker: Conversations with 21 Humor Writers About Their Craft* (F+W Press); *SEX: Our Bodies, Our Junk* (Random House); *Your Wildest Dreams, Within Reason* (Tin House) and *Poking a Dead Frog: More Conversations with Humor Writers* (Viking/Penguin.) The book is a sequel to *And Here's the Kicker*.

[Bombeck Workshop](#) Retweeted

[WinningWriters.com](#) @winningwriters

Extended to May 22: The Emerging Writer's Contest; win \$2,000 and pub for fiction, nonfiction, and poetry | [ow.ly/GFSV30bSro1](#) @pshares



[Bombeck Workshop](#) Retweeted 20 May

[Bombeck Workshop](#) Retweeted

[NSNC Columnists](#) @NSNCgroup

Columnist [@TheGinaBarreca](#)'s quotable wisdom lands on a greeting card. Hear more at the [#NSNC17](#) annual Conference June 8-11 in NH [#AmWriting](#)

It's not that diamonds are a girl's best friend. It's your best friends who are your diamonds.

-Gina Barreca-

quotablecards

[Bombeck Workshop](#) Retweeted 20 May

Join our [Yahoo](#) Discussion group!

Article archives

[Advice for writers](#)

[Author interviews](#)

[Humor writer of the month](#)

[Markets & contests](#)

[News](#)

[Self-publishing](#)

[Who's publishing what?](#)

[Workshop](#)