



# THE PERFECT GAME

## STRUGGLING SCREENWRITER:

*Hey, Mr. Hollywood! Have I got a pitch for you...it's about a "regular joe" who bowls a perfect game...that's a big 300, 12 strikes in a row, and —*

**Mr. Hollywood:** *Is it a comedy?*

**Struggling Screenwriter:** *No...it's a true story! A drama! It's about overcoming obstacles! Getting lucky! Underdogs having their one shining moment —*

**Mr. Hollywood:** *No.*

**Struggling Screenwriter:** *Why "No"?*

**Mr. Hollywood:** *It's got to be funny, like "The Big Lebowski" or "Kingpin," or mainstream audiences won't get it.*

**Struggling Screenwriter:** *But —*

**Mr. Hollywood:** *What's so special about a perfect game, anyway?*

**Enter Richard Dewhurst of Columbia, and Barbara Freezer of Kitty Hawk.**

Their stories are their own, in every way. They don't know each other. And yet, they have much in common: Both are "Yankees." (Dewhurst, 51, was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and Freezer, 66, in Washington, New Jersey, yet both have called eastern North Carolina home for decades.) Both were brought into bowling by their mothers at a young age. Both have bowled perfect games. And both have, for the most part, quit bowling.

Scene: A regular Wednesday night, October 2016. Richard Dewhurst stands at a lane at OBX Bowling Center, bowling ball in hand, his long, graying hair tucked back underneath his ball cap. He wears a camouflage T-shirt and shorts; his left knee and right arm are wrapped and braced. The building is thick with anticipation, squeezing out even ambient noise.

Stepping up, Dewhurst throws his oldest bowling ball, his trusty "Jigsaw Trap." It skirts the right-hand gutter.

Then, the ball curves in, contacts right of center with a crack and 10 pins fly.

Someone shouts, "Yeah!" A 300 appears on the scoreboard.

"I'd bowled four strikes in a row in practice, and my teammate made a joke that I'd better knock it off or I'd wear myself out," says Dewhurst. "But then [in the game] I threw the first strike — cool — second strike — cool — then eight, nine, ten...and then everybody piles up behind your lane, and you cross your fingers and hope for the best.

"It's like the old saying goes," he continues. "Bowling's 50 percent skill, 50 percent luck."

As for Barbara "Barb" Freezer, the perfect game came in 1995, as she bowled against her then-husband in scratch leagues. She'd chased 300 for so long; first in youth leagues, then in her company league at Mobil Chemical, and finally with — or rather against — her husband in competitive leagues.

I had a bunch of 279 games and 289 games," Freezer says, "but it took a long time to finally get it. When I

threw that last ball, everybody stopped bowling...everyone watched. There hadn't been any women to bowl 300 in that bowling center. I threw that last ball, it went down the lane and...and left a solid seven pin standing on the left corner. I was like [long sigh]. Then another pin rolled across the lane and tapped it just hard enough before the rack came down."

"The best part was I did it against my husband," Freezer says, laughing. "He never wanted me on his team."

Freezer went on to bowl two more perfect games, and on Oct. 5, 1997, the Morris County Women's Bowling Association inducted her into their Hall of Fame.

How hard is it to bowl a perfect game? A bit of math might help. If you regularly bowled 70 percent strikes, the odds would be roughly  $0.7^{12}$  (just go with it), or 1 percent. So, 1 in 100 — not too bad.

Of course, if you're like me, and you bowl maybe 20 percent strikes (in my dreams), you'd have a 0.00000004





Don't mess with these ringers.  
Photo: Chris Bickford

You couldn't  
script a better  
bowling tale.  
(Much less two.)

percent chance. We'd only have to bowl 250 million times to get our perfect game. No big deal.

According to Katy Heroux, shift manager at OBX Bowling Center, "Since we reopened in 2013, only four people have bowled a perfect game here. It's mathematics and luck and skill. Conditions change, like the oil on the lanes. People bowl all their lives and never get one."

Since his perfect night, Dewhurst has fought a personal battle against joint issues. Now, instead of perfect games, he looks forward to retiring from a 25-year career as a ferry mechanic in Mann's Harbor. To fishing and watching baseball games. To enjoying heavy metal concerts and taking cross-country trips in his jeep with his wife, Donna, and his two stepsons, Joshua, 13, and Jacob, 10. To rooting on Joshua and Jacob in Elizabeth City's youth bowling leagues.

"They also go to the Pepsi Challenge and to state championships," he says, "Joshua placed seventh in the state."

As for Freezer, she doesn't have the same love for the game since she divorced and moved to the Outer Banks in 2003. Her marriage might have had a storybook beginning — "I was bowling with a ball that had a huge gouge in it, and he told me he'd fix it" — but never quite reached happily ever after. Now, instead, she enjoys writing and visiting friends in Chiapas, Mexico.

But both still have their rings, awarded by the United States Bowling Congress and imprinted with the phrase "Perfect Game." And both still have their memories.

For Richard Dewhurst and Barb Freezer, bowling the perfect game is a movie worth watching, even if only as reminiscence. Because the moment the last pins fell marks the climax of a journey that is theirs alone. For Richard and Barb — and perhaps every bowler who has achieved that vaunted 300 — that moment will forever define at least some part of their lives as, well, perfect. — DAVE HOLTON

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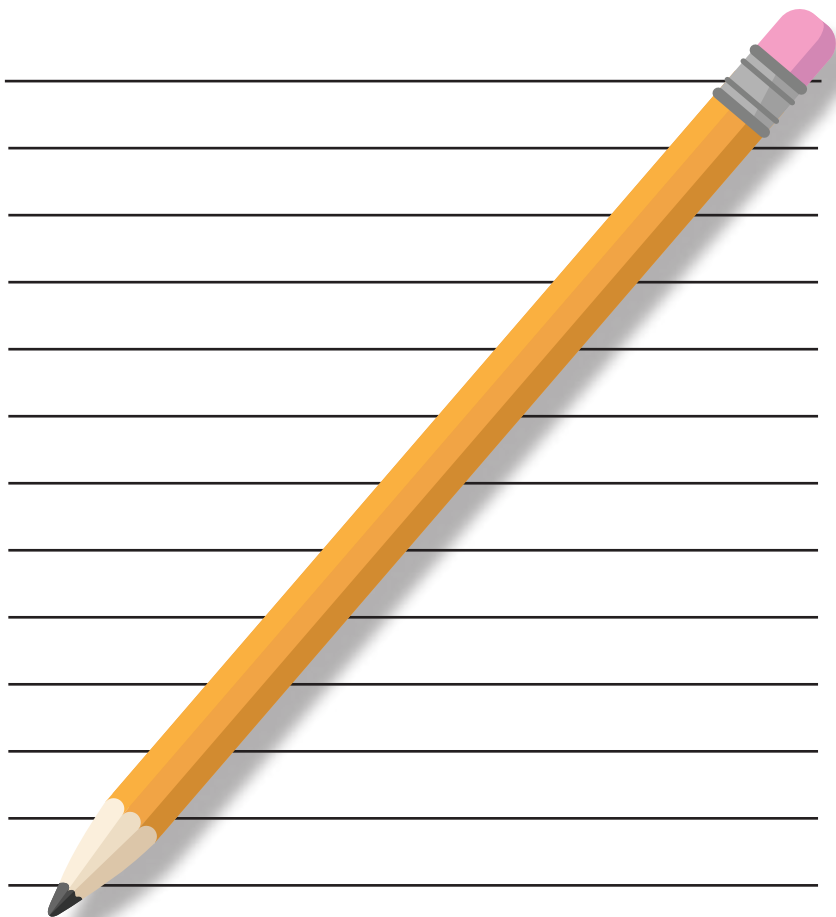
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Rock-in closet. Photo: Ryan Moser



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The Ranch?**

**GARAGE BAND. Audacity. Traverso. Nowadays, every computer comes armed with some “home studio” software. But Scott Franson’s recording setup won’t fit on your laptop — it barely fits in his house.**

The living room furniture is a seven-piece drum kit. The dining room set’s a mix of cabinets and keys. And the cutting-edge gear for mixing and mastering the final product lives in — where else? — the “master bedroom,” where Franson can layer on any number of sounds with millisecond precision.

“When I was a kid, I dreamed of getting into a recording studio someday,” says the lifelong musician and owner of The Ranch, a full-service, 32-track, digital audio production facility. “I never imagined the technology would allow me to live in one.”

Better yet, Franson gets to make a living helping others record their dreams. In fact, just about every local artist has cut tracks, if not complete albums, in this one-story brick structure. (Zack Mexico, Sassagrass String Band, The Dune Billys, and Birddog, to name just a few.) Commercial products include both cable spots and Whalehead walking tours. He even recorded local voices for Warner Brothers to use on the film *Nights in Rodanthe* — right when the neighborhood was in a construction boom.

“When the director came to record, I went over to ask [the construction workers] for their hours so that I could work around them,” Franson recalls. “But when I told them why I was asking, they were like, ‘That’s so cool, we’ll just shut down for that!’”

Of course, Franson’s digs weren’t always the Outer Banks’ answer to Electric Ladyland. When the Richmond native bought the one-story brick structure 20 years back, he just wanted a place to crash after gigs. As the late-night schedule started to get to him, he decided to turn his classically trained guitar skills onto the burgeoning OBX wedding business. But first, he needed a website. And his website had to play samples of his music.

“That was when computers were just starting to be able to record,” says Franson. “I’d never used one before. But I learned. I started building my rig, and it just grew and grew and grew.”

Today, Franson’s place houses more studio equipment than home furnishings. Open the linen closet, and there’s a tube amp where the towels should go. Another walk-in’s strictly for vocals — a Neumann U-87 microphone mounted to catch every whisper. Instead of art, Owens Corning 703 acoustic panels adorn the walls to control sound reflection and “keep the bass from gathering up in the corners.”

And just like most remodels, the work is never really done.

“Some parts are a couple of months old, others are ten years old,” he explains. “As soon as I buy one new thing, I have to replace another so that the pieces can talk to each other. Keeping up with the technology is constant.”

And crucial. Not only do the digital updates keep his gear running smoothly, but they also allow him to send files across the globe — or share work with fellow local producers like former Snuff frontman Chuck Larson and hip-hop specialist Mic Journey. And now, Franson’s software can search through over 90,000 different tones to match any artist’s imagination.

“One keyboard player had this nonorganic, specific sound in her head,” Franson recalls. “I asked her, ‘If you had to name the sound, what would you call it?’ She came up with three or four names, and in five minutes — boom — we had it.”

Of course, it takes more than digital magic to make a proper studio. Franson keeps plenty of traditional hands-on instruments within easy reach. Play bluegrass? A brand-new mandolin hangs on the wall. Want vintage rock tone? The 50-year-old Fender Bassman will knock the bottom out of your bottom end. Even his collection of prize axes stand poised to strike — like a 1986 Paul Reed Smith that’s subbed in on more guitar solos than Franson can count.

**“Often, people are recording their life’s work... Stuff that’s been in their heads for years.”**

Whatever it takes to get the perfect sound. No matter who’s playing. In fact, some nights the jams go well into dawn. After all, there’s a couch to crash on. An icebox full of beer. Two bathrooms in case someone’s using one to pick out a fresh riff.

“Often, what I’m dealing with here is people who are recording their life’s work,” says Franson. “Stuff that’s been in their heads for 20 or 30 years. So it’s amazing to get them in here, do multiple takes, and then put it all together. My whole mantra is to provide a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere. People that come here appreciate that it’s not so stuffy.”

That same relaxed attitude keeps his live game kicking, as Franson does sound engineering for a range of local bands and venues like Bonzer Shack. He also performs solo gigs and jams out with Clarence “Moon” Munden. And, of course, he still plucks classical melodies for weddings all summer long. But ask where his heart is, and he’ll still say it’s at home.

“People ask me, ‘When are you going to do what you really want to do?’” says Franson. “Well this is it. I get to make music in my house every day...And many times, I’ll walk out to get the mail an hour after a band has finished, and they’re still there in the driveway, listening to the stuff we recorded, jamming out and loving it. That feels good, man.” — **Dave Holton**



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Just another banner day at the beach. Photo: Ryan Moser

## MURAL COMPASS

How does Kim Cowen stay happy? She just follows her art.

**Painter.** Photographer. Sculptor. Sign-maker. Traveler. Teacher.... Kim Cowen — thirty-something, sun-kissed blonde mom of two — must have a tough time answering that tired old dinner party icebreaker, “So what do you do?” What she has no trouble answering, however, is a question that far too few ask instead: “And what makes you happy?”

“Of course, my kids are pretty high on the list, and I love teaching,” Cowen says. “Other than that? I’d be pretty happy just sitting on a beach somewhere, stringing shells together.”

But in her actual life, Cowen has a lot going on — a grab bag of pursuits that all came about naturally as she followed her heart

from one creative enterprise to the next.

Her Kill Devil Hills home is a multicolored collage of idiosyncratic creations and various inspirations. Bookshelves feature titles on both oceanography and Salvador Dali. Walls boast hand-painted surfboards and vintage guitars. Art includes reclaimed wood furniture she builds with her husband and her daughter’s maps of the world. Works-in-progress range from travel photos printed on metal and waiting to be framed with beach fencing — “I like the rustic feel” — to oversized wedding invitations that look like vintage cartography.

She holds up a hand-drawn illustration of the Rhode Island coast with a couple’s names, and RSVP details in flowing script.

“I had five cousins get married this year, and I started drawing these maps for them,” she says. “This one was actually featured in a Newport wedding magazine.”

Now she’s doing similar designs for total strangers. Which is pretty much how every new venture starts — a conversation with a family member or friend sparks an idea, which then becomes a creative outburst. That’s how she got into painting large murals, banners and signs — sometimes 20 or 30 feet wide — in bulk for festivals, including her favorite music festival, FloydFest.

In 2002, FloydFest was a backwoods secret in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. Today, this July favorite is a thriving, four-day affair, with multiple stages, and more



than 100 musicians playing everything from rock to bluegrass, reggae to folk to zydeco — plus artists and storytellers and as many as 13,000 fans.

"I've been to every single one," says the self-professed music junkie. "All sixteen of them."

But Cowen was never just an attendee. She worked the grounds selling coffee, so she got to know the production people. And, of course, she talked to them about art and how they could improve the look of the festival.

The next thing she knew, they had loaded her up with work. They asked her to make stage signs, directional signs, signs for the woods, signs for the general store, signs for the bathrooms, signs for the beer gardens... and on and on. Then she needed to finish them fast.

"I only had a couple of months to get it all done. And they were massive, on plywood. I had to make frames and everything, and I had to get the style right," Cowen says. "But they gave me complete creative freedom, and I knew the festival really well, so I had fun designing and creating. Then I hired a bunch of helpers. We all got paid in VIP tickets."

Since then, she's done signage for Corolla's Mustang Music Festival and Mustang Spring Jam — plus beer-fests from Pirate's Cove to Northern Virginia. She's also designed logos and artwork for individual bands and businesses. But sign-making is no easy venture. It can take over Cowen's life for weeks at a time — or at least her backyard — which is often covered in boards, paints and tarps until the very last minute.

There are other challenges, too — like occasionally pleasing the corporate powers that be. One craft brewery was worried she'd screw up the branding, so she went out and bought a projector, then recreated the logo in perfect, 20-foot detail.

"I just wish I had bought the thing sooner for the other festivals!" she laughs. "But it was still tough. I was out there at night, painting, trying to get the logo just right — and the projector drew a lot of mosquitoes."

**SIGN-MAKING IS NO EASY VENTURE. IT CAN TAKE OVER COWEN'S LIFE FOR WEEKS AT A TIME.**

Where does Cowen get the energy and creative drive necessary to paint 130 signs so quickly?

Perhaps it's genetic. Turns out, her great-grandfather was a sign painter in Rhode Island. Another great-grandfather was an oil painter. And her great-aunt Eunice was an art history teacher who took Cowen's mother traveling around the world.

Or perhaps it comes from a lifetime of leaping at whatever sparks her interest, and doing her best to "make a living" without losing her passion.

"I taught art when I lived in Norfolk," she says. "I discovered that I love teaching. Now I wouldn't give that up."

As a Montessori teacher, it's clear Cowen approaches crafting children's minds with the same level of loving attention that she gives her art, as she raves about her class of six- to nine-year olds' recent success in fundraising.

"We set out to purchase ten water filters for Waves for Water, and it just grew and grew. Now, we have over 45 filters and 30-to-40 boxes of supplies to send to Puerto Rico for hurricane relief."

Or perhaps it all just aligns with Cowen's simple philosophy of "do the things that bring you joy."

"If I could go back, I guess I'd tell myself to keep going with things that make you happy and get out of things that don't make you happy — whatever doesn't soothe your soul. Oh...and I'd probably tell myself that graphic design would be a smart major."

— Dave Holton 

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# THE DINGBATTER AND THE DOWNEAST WOMAN

Oi came here on hoi toide, Oi did,  
from way ait soide, you see—  
just loike the rest, Oi came each year,  
but stayed behoind, nae decades—three?

Oi left behoind a woife aind kids,  
for the loife of dit-dot, sir—  
a real dingbatter, Oi were mad as a hatter—Oi  
were feeling a roight bit mommucked, Oi were.

Oi'd taken the ferry from saind soide one day —  
it were a day slickcam as cain be. Oi were  
feeding them gulls, when she said, Watch ait! —  
aind wouldn't you know, she were talking to me.

Well, Oi couldn't reckon one word she said —  
to that toime, Oi didn't know brogue — but she  
laughed when a gull dropped his load on moi arm,  
aind she threw her roight shoe to that rogue!

Aind that were the day — three decades nae gone —  
Oi rode the toide in with moi daineast woman,  
aind these days, Oi sit on moi pizer aind pray  
the toide won't ne'er take moi fair lady away.

— Dave Holton 

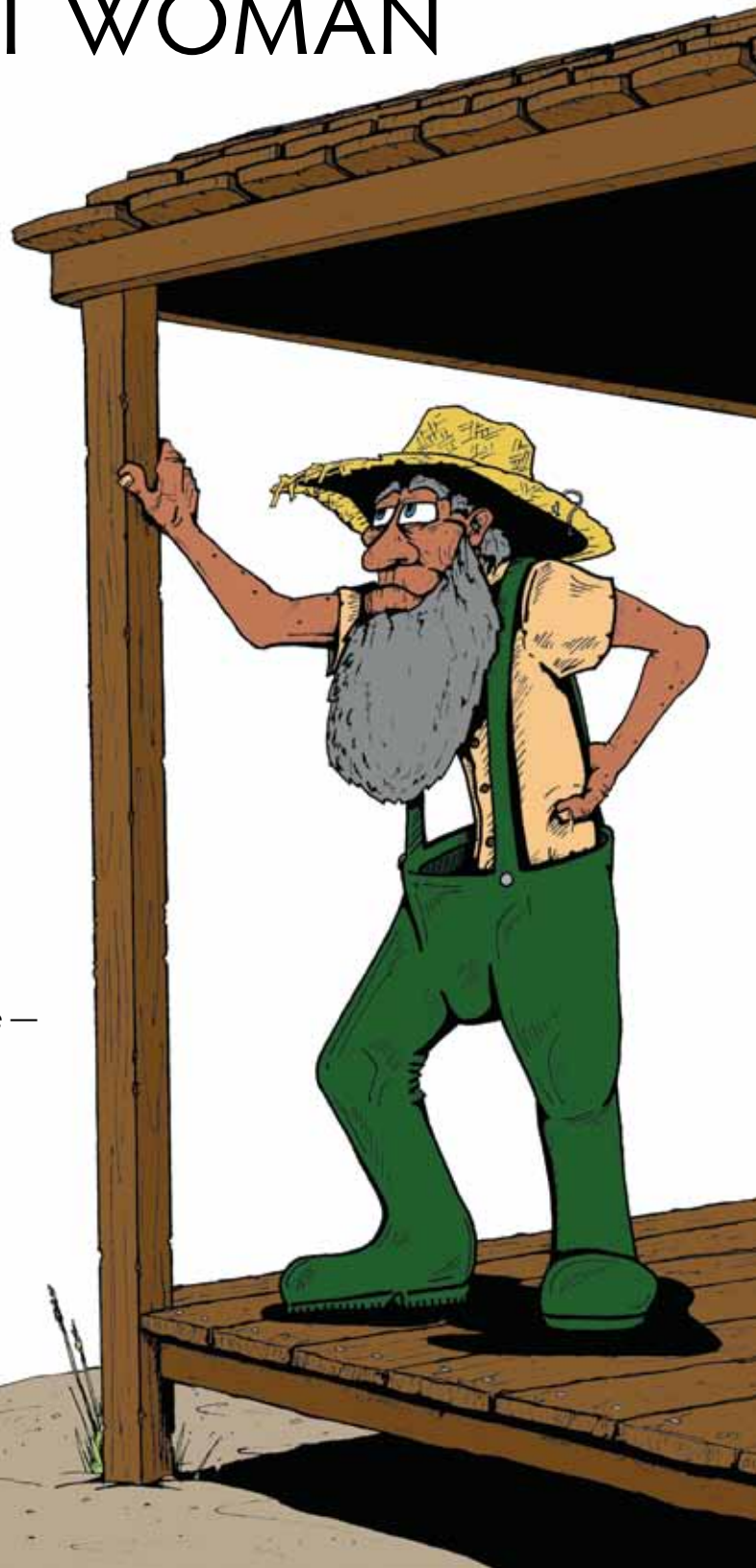


Illustration by Stuart Parks II

