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AUTHOR TO TEENS: FANGS A MILLION

New Lenox writer asks students to sink their teeth into his new vampire novel

Among the cardinal rules of being a successful writer: Know your audience.

And if your audience is composed of mostly teenagers, you might find yourself spending a day surrounded by 160 eighth-grade critics.

When author Norm Cowie asked students at Martino Junior High School in New Lenox to give it to him straight, they were only too happy to oblige.

In 2007, Cowie, the author of "The Adventures of Guy" series, was concerned that his newest book, "Fang Face," lacked the proper voice. It was his first attempt at writing for the teenage audience and he knew that age group could be fierce critics.

So he did the brave thing. He shared the first 50 pages with the students in Mary Jo Allison's and Kim Runions' classes.

They studied the manuscript and then met with Cowie to deliver their reviews.

"It was fantastic feedback," said Cowie, who lives in New Lenox.

"They really liked the dodgeball game, so I added a second," Cowie said. "But they thought the scenes changed too quickly, and they said the mom character was too whiny."

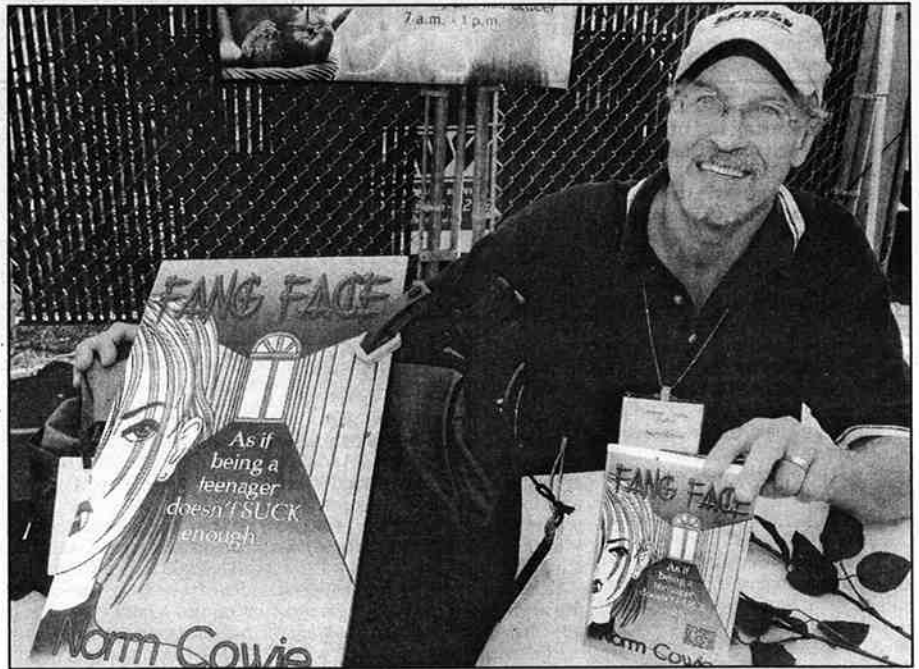
So Cowie lengthened each scene and toughened up the mom.

"I was hoping they'd help me come up with a better title, but they didn't."

At the time, the book was simply dubbed, "Not Your Typical Vampire Story." Eventually, his wife, Nathalie Moore, solved that

'The cool thing about creating a vampire world is that you get to create the whole world, with your own rules.'

Norm Cowie
AUTHOR



How to write a book that doesn't suck: Norm Cowie, of New Lenox, displays a copy of his new book, "Fang Face," in Palos Heights. Cowie shared the first 50 pages of the book with students at Martino Junior High School in New Lenox, and they offered him feedback. MARY COMPTON - SOUTHTOWNSTAR

problem by suggesting "Fang Face: As if Being a Teenager Doesn't Suck Enough ..."

The book, being released this weekend, will be available at Borders, Barnes & Noble, Empire Books in Frankfort and from Echelon Press (echelonpress.com). It can also be ordered from Cowie's Web site, normcowie.com.

Naturally, it will be featured in Martino's Book Club. Cowie plans a return visit to the school to talk with students about the experience.

"It was very brave of him to come here and let the students critique his work," Allison said. "Eighth-graders are very honest. They talk first and filter later."

But, she added, Cowie encouraged them to speak their minds.

"They had some things they didn't like. They thought that parts of the book were too babyish," she said. "They wanted it more mature."

Cowie, she said, seemed grateful for the feedback.

Cowie said he was indeed. The kids not only helped him improve the story but there's always the chance they could help in the marketing department.

"Kids are mini-marketers. If they like your book, they get behind it. They post it on MySpace and Facebook," he said.

"Fang Face" is packed with

teen topics: vampires, social misfits, acne, concerned parents and the aforementioned dodgeball games.

"The cool thing about creating a vampire world is that you get to create the whole world, with your own rules," Cowie said.

Cowie, who has two daughters ages 21 and 18, said he specifically set out to write a book that would appeal to both genders.

"A lot of people think the 'Twilight' series is aimed at girls," he said. "I wanted mine to have a broader appeal."

He has plans to visit many other local schools to talk about writing and, while he's there, perhaps to get material for his sequel, "Werewolf."