



Penwheels Newsletter



Winter 2015

For Escapees Writers, Published or Not



Tips From Jaimie

By Jaimie Hall Bruzenak

👤 "Procrastination is the thief of time."
..... —Edward Young

"End Your Procrastination and Get Back into Writing Mode!" Good tips.

👤 Anyone thinking about self-publishing should read this article, "Self-Publishing: More than Just a Writing Gig" by Allen Taylor, which appeared in Writers Weekly 9/29/15. He lists a number of things you should think about before you write that book and publish it.

👤 "Great Writing Gig Or A Scam? 10 Red Flags!" By Melissa Rudy in Writer's Weekly ezine of 2-19-15 gives you ways to identify a scam if you are looking for paying freelance writing assignments.

Some are common sense or apply to other things on the Internet. It may keep you from making a costly mistake - costly in that you don't get paid or paid an unfair amount for your work. Read the article here.



Braggin' Rights

By Joanne Alexakis

*Escapees Newsletter
Nov/Dec Issue*

Betty Prange #22195

contributed a picture of 1870's-era buildings at the California State Historic Park in Bodie, CA.

About 15 years ago, Nick & I visited Betty at Bodie SP when she was working there. She gave a great tour of the old mining town to our group of tourists. - page 87

Janet Shaw #111544 submitted a photo of ruins at Rhyolite Ghost Town, the 1905 gold rush town, by Beatty, Nevada. - page 87

Ramona Creel SKP #97787

Using Your Computer as a Trip-Planning Tool - page 34.

Ramona is a professional organizer and illustrates for us how to research our travel (favoring back country roads). She also finds sights of interest (the Spam Museum!), and lands at a comfortable destination for dinner (with coupons) - all using her trusty computer.



This Issue

Tips From Jaimie

Braggin' Rights

Book Reviews

Commonly Misused Words

Fiction Tips From Ellen

The Critique Desk

From the Editor

The World of Publishing

Writing Jobs

Editor: Margo Armstrong
[Margo @ TheMaxwellGroup.net](mailto:Margo@TheMaxwellGroup.net)

Web Moderator:

Margo Armstrong

Membership: Joanne Alexakis
[joalexakis @ earthlink.net](mailto:joalexakis@earthlink.net)

Historian: Doris Hutchins
[valentinedh @ gci.net](mailto:valentinedh@gci.net)

Penwheels is a private group of Escapees members who enjoy writing and discussing the writing adventure.

The Penwheels Newsletter is digitally published quarterly. Free to all members via eMail and online.

Book Reviews

By Joanne Alexakis

Grandma's Other Life



North Ranch, the Escapees RV Park near Congress, Arizona, is a relaxing destination surrounded by mountains and vast desert landscapes. Yet, it is an active community and a great place to visit, which Nick and I did last October.



Photo by Nick Alexakis

Of course, I stopped in to see Penwheeler Helen Taylor (SKP #295) who lives there. Helen and I were having a good chat when she mentioned her book, *Grandma's Other Life*. She put this book together a few years ago, but I hadn't read it yet.

But I have now! What a fun read! Helen opted to write about some of her special life memories for her grandsons (and future great-grandchildren) to become better acquainted with her and realize that there is more to Grandma than "Grandma"!

In *Grandma's Other Life*, Helen takes us on some of her unique life adventures. We walk with Helen to her home in Des Moines, Iowa, encountering a dog attack on the way. We drive with Helen to Pueblo, Colorado, for a date with some baseball players. We fly with Helen to Japan holding her 3-month-old daughter close all the way. We meet Helen's husband, Wayne, Helen and Wayne's two daughters, Helen and Wayne's five grandsons, and we hope with Helen for many great-grandchildren to come. (She wants great-granddaughters, boys!)

Helen's message to all Penwheelers: "*If I can write a book, so can you!*"

Joanne would like to pass Helen's book along to other Penwheelers to read. Email joalexakis@earthlink.net with your snailmail address.

Chasing Rainbows

Thank you, **Kay Peterson**, for taking me on your journey. Kay's new book, *Chasing Rainbows*, covers in mini-stories many of her life adventures with special people (especially Joe Peterson) and special places. She writes about making choices, facing fears, and accepting opportunities.

I enjoyed reading these vignettes, plus they brought back memories to me. Kay relates stories about the love of her life, Joe Peterson, and his fondness for joke telling.

At North Ranch, the SKP RV park in Congress, Arizona, I visited long, long-time Penwheeler, Norma Scheall. (R.I.P., Norma.) Norma used to tell me about her husband, Jack Scheall, and Joe Peterson swapping great jokes. Norma still was laughing years later.

Kay appreciated the non-conformist lady who nailed carpet remnants all over her lawn to combat dust from the lack of grass. How's that for an innovative woman? In another chapter, we hear about Vera, an RVer with cancer who was determined to make her last trip. Vera finished her bucket list by traveling to Alaska with the help of friends and strangers. She died shortly later.

Memories were stirred for me as I read Kay's writings. She included a chapter on Korczak Ziolkowski, the sculptor of *Crazy Horse Monument* in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

She tells of his dedication to his stone mountain memorial. In 1996, I met Korczak's wife, Ruth, after he had passed away. She was a fine businesswoman and shared his vision. Along with their children, Ruth continued to build, improve, and maintain the statue carving.

Continued >>>>>

Kay's stories get personal-and brave. She told about experiencing the isolation of tuberculosis and beating the odds against her TB. And if you think that is fearless, you should read my favorite tale, which is when she was visiting South Africa and rode an ostrich in a race - page 210 - too funny!

I liked the quips that headed each chapter: you can't have rainbows without rain; the difference between stumbling blocks and stepping stones is based on how you use them; we are not "all on the same page" and sometimes not even reading the same book.

This is a warm cozy read, filled with inspiration. Like her up-front column in the Escapees magazine, we can always count on Kay for wisdom, wit and humor. Thanks again, Kay.

Joanne would like to pass Kay's book along to other Penwheelers to read. Email joalexakis@earthlink.net with your snailmail address.



To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme. No great and enduring volume can ever be written on the flea, though many there be that have tried it.

—Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough.

—Oprah Winfrey

Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing.

—Benjamin Franklin



Commonly Misused Words and Phrases

From the [Business Insider](#) comes this tidbit of information about the *58 most commonly misused words and phrases*.

Some of the better words from the list include:

- *Begs the question* **means** assumes what it should be proving and **does not mean** raises the question.
- *Credible* **means** believable and **does not mean** credulous or gullible.
- *Dichotomy* **means** two mutually exclusive alternatives and **does not mean** difference or discrepancy.
- *Enormity* **means** extreme evil and **does not mean** enormousness.
- *Literally* **means** in actual fact and **does not mean** figuratively.
- *Meretricious* **means** tawdry or offensively insincere and **does not mean** meritorious.
- *Politically correct* **means** dogmatically left-liberal and **does not mean** fashionable, trendy.
- *Staunch* **means** loyal, sturdy and **does not mean** to stanch a flow.

From [Grammar Girl's 101 Misused Words You'll Never Confuse Again](#):

- *Bated breath* **instead of** baited breath.
- *For all intents and purposes* **instead of** for all intensive purposes.
- *Honing in* **instead of** homing in (like the pigeon), unless the topic is pigeons.
- *Beckon call* **instead of** beck and call.



Finding Your Voice

By Ellen Behrens

Quiz!

True or False: Who tells the story is only important if you're using first person because third person is just the writer anyway. [Reminder: first person uses "I" and third person uses "he" or "she."]

The answer is **False**. Many writers make this mistake - and end up with a story or novel readers (including agents and publishers) fail to connect with. The subtle element at work is voice.

Can you see the differences in these examples?

"Nancy held the dinner party invitation in shaking hands. She read it three times, each time slowly and carefully, looking for clues as to Judilynn's motive. She always had one, after all. Was it to embarrass her? Or was it a genuinely friendly gesture? It was so hard to tell with Judilynn. Nancy dropped the invitation on the table with the rest of the day's mail. She'd decide about the party later."

"Nancy's hands shook like an addict's after a long dry spell, shook so bad she couldn't read the writing, a fancy script meant to look like handwriting. Nothing about Judilynn was real. Fake hair color. Fake nails. Fake smile. Fake friends. The only real thing about Judilynn was her ability to toss back drink after drink without falling on her face. No, it wasn't the kind of get-together Nancy wanted to be a part of. Not even worth the boost in social status she'd get from attending."

Although both paragraphs are third person limited and told in the past tense, the first uses full sentences whereas the second uses sentence fragments ("Fake hair color. Fake nails."). The first spends some time inside Nancy's head, wondering why Judilynn sent the invitation, deciding not to think about attending.

The second paints a picture of Judilynn while revealing Nancy's attitude about her.

These differences distinguish the "narrative voice" at work in each paragraph. A snarky, cynical voice fits certain stories while a light, conversational voice works better in others. Finding and maintaining the right narrative voice for your story is essential. Sometimes it emerges organically while other times it's a struggle. Either way, voice is as important for engaging your readers as any other element of your fiction.

If your story is "missing something" and you've tried everything else, pick section of narration at random. Re-write it with a laid back or proper attitude. Experiment. Remember: first person or third - it doesn't matter. Your story still needs a voice.

In a dilemma about something you're working on? Have a topic idea? Drop Ellen an eMail at ellenbehr@aol.com or - better yet! - post it on the Penwheels forum so we can all benefit!

Ellen Behrens' newest novel, *Pea Body*, is the first in a series featuring characters Walt and Betty Rollin, full-time RVers who solve mysteries. She is a former fiction editor and the recipient of an Ohio Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship. She and her husband have been living the "full-timer" RV lifestyle since 2009. Learn more about her books at www.ellenbooks.com.

FROM THE EDITOR

YouTube Video - A Beginner's Guide to the World of Self-Publishing

This video discusses the differences between conventional publishing and self-publishing. Very good dialogue but 2014 answers.

Learn more about *Full Sail University* [HERE](#).



The *Critique Desk*

Here we go! The first project to land on the *Critique Desk*.

As you remember from the *Fall Newsletter*, this critique from members is invited by the author. Give me your opinion about the plot, point out where the story goes astray (if it does) or seems unbalanced. This information is forwarded to the author to assist in the rewrite.

Since we only have one submission, the special edition planned for February is not necessary. The *Spring Newsletter* will run this story again as revised by the author (with byline).

Send comments, critiques, summaries to [Margo @ TheMaxwellGroup.net](mailto:Margo@TheMaxwellGroup.net)

BINGO!

"Bingo!" shouted Helen. Again. We all nodded our heads and smiled at her. The activity director signaled for me to go help Helen. I was assisting the resident bingo players at the nursing home in Cordele, Georgia. Some didn't hear well or see all that good and needed an extra set of eyes to aid in finding the number that had been called. Some, like Helen, got quite creative with their bingo cards. After all, winner's prize was a sweet treat: a candy bar, an apple or maybe a banana.

It was 1999, and my husband and I had parked our 5th wheel at a RV park near Cordele. Nick was working on a temporary fiber optics project and I was seeking interests to occupy my time.

For a month, I volunteered at the nursing home. Mostly I walked the corridors, smiling at any resident sitting out in the hall, giving a polite greeting and asking if they wanted a manicure. It was a little gentle socialization for the folks living at the home and a rewarding way for me to spend my time since my husband was working away from the RV all day long.

If they were agreeable, I would pull out my small basin, fill it with warm water to soak their hands, and find myself a chair. Jamie, the activity director, had given me only a few tools - one being an emery board. It was the most dangerous weapon she would allow me to use around her charges. After a soapy soaking, I would clean under the person's nails and file their nails nice and even. The finishing touch was the lotion. I would smooth a creamy gel onto their fingers and hands. It was as soothing for me as it was for them.

When I first walked down the halls, everyone was shy and no one was interested in getting a manicure from me, even though I told them that Jamie sent me. But one lady finally got brave and let me handle her hands. The others watched what I was doing to their friend and her reaction to the manicure. When she gave me a big thank-you grin another wanted to try it, and another, and another - guys, too. Some folks were friendly and chit chatted the entire session, others were more reserved.

One woman told me she had grown up with Jimmie Carter near Plains, Georgia. She said that he was a very nice man. I could tell she was an elegant lady of the old Southern class. That "Old South" charm radiates from their personas.

Another very refined lady didn't speak to me for her entire manicure. The nursing home staff said that she normally didn't talk to anyone. She stayed to herself in her room all the time. When I finished moisturizing her hands and turned to walk out the door, she said, "Thank you for doing my nails." The next time I returned to the nursing home, I was told that lady had died that same evening. A humbling feeling struck me - I felt I had had the honor of aiding her in preparation for Heaven.

One gentleman wailed constantly all day long. Ralph said not a word, but gave out a low groan continually. The staff asked me to do Ralph's nails, but not to expect him to speak other than repeating his moans.

Continued >>>>>

Towards the end of the manicure when I was rubbing the lotion into his hands, one of the nurses said, "Listen to Ralph!" There was no noise.

Ralph wasn't making a sound; he was quiet as can be. We were in the activities area and the staff was having a meeting with the residents. I stayed with Ralph, holding his hand while they discussed matters. He was silent the entire time. It is a miracle what a little hand holding can do.

We played bingo often. Many of the residents enjoyed this entertainment and it always progressed the same. The lady heading the games would call out the numbers, "G-51! I-18! B-4!"

Helen would yell, "Bingo!" with every number pulled starting with the first one. I would check her card. There were little black chips on every square. Helen had a Bingo! horizontally, vertically, four corners, blackout - you name it - Helen was a winner! I cleared her card, so she could start again with the rest of the crowd.

The caller announced, "B-3."

Helen hollered, "Bingo!"

End of Critique Desk Project_____

Gender Neutral Writing

This is a [conversation](#) a lot of people have been having for a long time.

Please read this with an open mind, and remember that approaching each other with language that is inclusive is good for everyone—and that's the point.

- Call "Mankind" Out
- Resist gender-izing perfectly good neutral words
- Practice The New Polite
- Consider the case for 'they'
- Try something new

[More details...](#)



Do You Copy?

Tips on Copy Editing Your Own Work

Janice Hardy at the *Fiction University* blog is lucky to have worked with some really top-notch copy editors over at HarperCollins. Their attention to detail and the variety of things they catch is quite impressive, and she learned something every time they proofed one of her books. Which of course meant her next book was cleaner and took less editing (or at least that's the goal).

Janice passes on a few of these tips: As you do the final polish run on your own novels, keep an eye out for these [very common editing goofs](#):

- Tense Issues
- Parallel Series
- Ambiguous Pronouns
- Not Quite the Right Word
- Who vs. That

You don't have to have a copy editor's skills to get published, but developing good writing skills is never a bad idea. But for those choosing the indie author path, developing your copy editing skills is a necessity if you don't have the budget for a copy editor to proof your work—typos and bad editing look unprofessional and that will hurt your sales and your credibility.

Her novels include *The Shifter*, (Picked as one of the *10 Books All Young Georgians Should Read*, 2014) *Blue Fire*, and *Darkfall* from Balzer+Bray/Harper Collins. The first book in her *Foundations of Fiction* series, *Planning Your Novel: Ideas and Structure* is out now.



Flash Fiction

[Indies Unlimited](#) has a weekly flash fiction competition open to everyone (no fees). There is a picture and a prompt every Saturday, and 250 word stories are accepted until Tuesday at 5 PM.

Unless a story is found offensive in some way, all stories are listed for readers. Some of those stories are selected for reader voting. If a story wins that week it is published with the other weekly winners in a year end anthology.

They now have three published anthologies.

It is a good way to sharpen some writing skills, as well as have your story read by a worldwide audience. Having your story or stories in another publication can also bring attention to your writing/author page.

Flash is a recognized format for fiction, with elements that each story ought to include. As usual with these sorts of things, the list of elements varies, depending on who's writing it.

As a general rule, flash fiction is considered to be less than 1,000 words long. And believe it or not, you can study how to write it.

1. A Plot
2. Characters
3. A Hook
4. A Slam-bang Finish

[Read more...](#)

An example of Flash Fiction by Penwheeler, Louis Silvestri, follows.



The Gutting

By Sylvester Lewis

(Flash Fiction from our Penwheels member, Louis Silvestri # 9919)

She lay there on her side, unable to move, but able to see the two of them that snatched her away and brought her to heaven knows where. They were standing over her when she heard the woman say "I never could do this. You know how much I hate it. Why do you enjoy it so much?" she asked. "Call me when you're finished," she cried out as she turned and ran from the room, leaving him to do what needed to be done.

He did enjoy this part even though she didn't. And he would get it over with quickly so they could relish the rest of the evening.

The victim just laid there, terrified. Her mouth wide open, gasping for air, to no avail. It was almost impossible for her to breathe. "Where am I?" she called out. "What are you going to do with me?"

But there was no voice. She couldn't be heard. Wild-eyed, she could only watch as the man reached into a drawer and pulled out a large knife.

He ran his finger down the blade and smiled his approval at its sharpness. As he walked towards her she suddenly realized what he was about to do. "No! Pleeaaase! No!" she screamed. "Why? Please don't do this."

But he wouldn't stop. "Let me go back to my family, my little ones....PLEASE!" she begged. But, still no voice. Only silence. She watched, helpless, frantic, still unable to move, unable to speak. He raised his arm.

All he could think about was the pleasure his efforts would bring. As the knife plunged towards her, she knew that it was the last thing she would ever see. Her life did not flash before her eyes.

Continued >>>>>

With the precision of years of experience, he made the first cut then slid the blade under her glistening skin and, with great relish, started to separate it from her body. He delicately removed a bone here, an unattractive piece there, his eyes shining with joy. When he was satisfied with the results of his efforts, he turned her over and started on the other side.

Completely engrossed in his work he didn't notice the spittle seeping from the corner of his mouth onto his unshaven chin. At last it was done. Completely gutted.

While cleaning up the gruesome, slimy mess, he suddenly stopped, looked down at his handiwork and shook his head. There's something amiss here, he thought. Then, as he wiped the drops of perspiration from his brow, he realized what had to be done. "Yes. Of course." He called out to his wife, "Honey, it's not gonna be enough. Reach into the bucket and bring me another trout."



The most important thing is to read as much as you can, like I did. It will give you an understanding of what makes good writing and it will enlarge your vocabulary.

—J. K. Rowling



5 Steps to Writing and Publishing an eBook

- 1. Write the content.** Use short sentences and short paragraphs. Write to the 5th-grade level. Give it to a friend to read. If you need help with punctuation or grammar, search the Internet for a professional editor.
- 2. Convert** to the correct format for eBookStores. A free conversion software, [Calibre](#), is available to download. The best option is to purchase commercial software, like [Atlantis](#) or [Jutoh](#), that have eBook conversion options.
- 3. Review the content.** Install the free software, [KindlePreviewer](#) so you can review (but not edit) your book as it looks on the Kindle eReader. To review and edit the ePub conversion, purchase [Atlantis](#) (includes Sigil for editing) mentioned above.
- 4. Create the cover.** If you need help, search the Internet for a professional cover artist. Do not publish without a cover if you want to sell your book in the bookstores.
- 5. Publish.** Put your book on sale. Upload the completed eBook conversion (Mobi and ePub), with cover, to the major eBookStores. I recommend starting with [Amazon](#) and [Barnes And Noble](#) (Nook Press) online stores. If you are a Mac-user, upload to Apple iBooks directly, if not, a book distributor is necessary to reach that market. For example, [Draft2Digital.com](#) is an easy-to-use aggregator.

No ISBN number necessary, no digital encryption (DRM), no review by a peer group, no critics of any kind; just upload and your book is on sale to the general public within 24 hours.

This is an excerpt from Margo Armstrong's eBook, "Writing & Publishing eBooks, One Person's Journey." Available at Amazon and bookstores worldwide.

THE WORLD OF PUBLISHING

October Author Earnings Report

US eBook Market

The [Digital Reader](#) writes that “Amazon Has an Even Bigger Share of the eBook Market Than We Thought.” Is this information embedded in the *October Author Earnings Report*?

Conventional wisdom says that Amazon has 65% of the US eBook market. The folks behind the Author Earnings Report would disagree.

Where past reports focused solely on the Kindle Store (or offered a similar single-store snapshot of a competing store), the [October report](#) offers a cross-sectional view of the US ebook market.

[Read more...](#)

What to do When Amazon Pulls Reviews

Penny Sanservieri with *Author Marketing Experts*, offers her opinion, “If you’ve ever had a review yanked off of Amazon you know how frustrating that can be. I’ve spoken to some authors who lost one and others who lost dozens.

Each time it is assumed that Amazon is the devil and that they get a certain amount of enjoyment just randomly pulling reviews. While I was pretty certain this was not true, I decided to call Amazon Author Central and get to the bottom of this.”

[The rest of the story....](#)

[Amazon can also sue you...](#)



American Authors Falling Below Poverty Line

Late last week *Publisher's Weekly* published a scary report on a recent *The Authors Guild* survey. According to Rachel Deahl, the state of the American author was dismal, with the majority earning below the US poverty line (56%, in fact).

56% of respondents indicated that their 2014 income from writing was less than \$11,670.

39% of respondents supported themselves exclusively through writing related work.

Narrow that down to full-time book authors, and the number jumps to 53% (up from 51% in 2009). Only 31% of part-time authors could make a similar boast.

The authors who had an agent earned an average of over three times as much as those without (\$4,000 vs \$14,500).

Authors who had a 4-year degree tended to earn the most from their writing (\$12,500), and the average income dropped as the level of education increased. A graduate degree (or even just a few classes) cut the average income.

Read the rest of the story [HERE](#).

Do E-Books Earn More Money at Lower Prices?

At the very least, raising prices doesn't appear to be helping the bottom line at big publishers.

As a writer, here's a statement that I think is true albeit painful to write: you don't need books.

You don't. You'll keep breathing without reading. Most of human history was book-free, yet our ancestors plodded on without the musings of Holden Caulfield or the witticisms of Elizabeth Bennet. That perspective is important because it helps understand some insights about the prices of books, especially e-books.

[Read on...](#)

Self-Publishing Scams

Beyond the art of writing lies the business of publishing. Just as you had to learn the basics of grammar, spelling, and style to become a writer, you must learn the basics of book production, distribution, and marketing to become a publisher.

There's no such thing as "hand off your manuscript and be done with it"—even in traditional publishing—but this fantasy is the flypaper that vanity presses use to attract and kill their prey.

Life is full of danger. Crossing the street is potentially fatal, but with a little bit of knowledge, it becomes a trivial undertaking with high odds of success. Publishing is no different.

- Research publishing before you finish your book.
- Work with a professional editor and designer, but contract this type of professional yourself.
- Own your assets. If you are a self-publisher, buy your own ISBN number.
- Run the numbers. Understand how many books you have to sell before you make any profit.

[The rest of the story...](#)

Amazon and Oyster Books: How Writers Get Paid

Say what you will about Amazon's new plan to pay a very small subset of authors based on the number of pages Unlimited customers read in their book.

There was no way for authors to get paid for borrowed books back when volumes were all paper and ink.

[Read the rest of this story...](#)

[Oyster Shucks Its Streaming eBook Service](#)

Writing Jobs

Mystery Weekly Magazine

"Mystery Weekly Magazine presents crime and mystery short stories by some of the world's best established and emerging mystery writers."

Pays \$0.05/word for 2000-10000 words

River Styx Magazine

"We publish thoughtful yet accessible, unpredictable yet moving literature and art." Pays at least \$25/poem and \$75/prose piece.

Copywriter Needed at Craigslist

Compensation: 10 cents per word; employment type: part-time; telecommuting okay

NASCAR Feature Writers

We are actively seeking Charlotte-based writers, but are interested in anyone currently covering NASCAR throughout the country.

Travel Blogger

If interested, please send 3-5 writing samples, the size of your social media following, where you have been published, and your availability to travel in December to lauren@digialedge.marketing.

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to all from the Penwheels staff.

