



Penwheels Newsletter

Spring Issue 2020

For Escapees Writers, Published or Not

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Jaimie's Tips

➤ I enjoy spotting Little Free Libraries in my travels. The boxes are often quite creative and rarely cookie-cutter. However there is a trademark controversy over other boxes being used in the same fashion. Both sides have interesting arguments. Read about it [HERE](#). Whatever they are called, they have contributed to literacy, and that was the goal of creator, Todd Bol.

➤ Whenever I encounter a "Little Free Library," I take a photo and send it to Margo for Penwheels. My latest is in the Browne's Addition Historic Neighborhood of Spokane, WA.

While in Spokane, we also visited Auntie's Bookstore, a nice independent bookstore in downtown Spokane. It seems smaller than I remember on a previous visit 15-20 years ago.

But any independent bookstore is lucky to still be in business!

➤ Paying opportunities for writing reviews are found in this week's [Writers Weekly](#). Can be done from home or your RV!

Andrew's Pine Little Library



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

The Penwheels Newsletter is digitally published quarterly.

[Archives Available](#)





Fiction Tips

Ellen Behrens

Nod your head if this has happened to you:

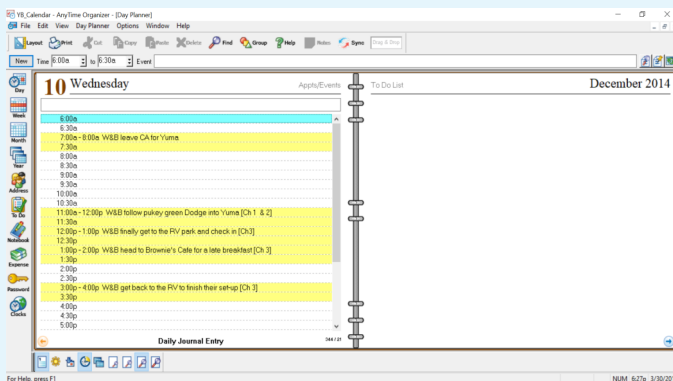
You're making great progress drafting your novel when suddenly you can't think of the name of a secondary character appearing in the scene you're writing right now. Focusing on what comes next without that name is impossible!

Nodding? Then you've discovered writing a novel is like chasing butterflies: thousands of details to track over many weeks and months.

So... do you go back through every page you've written, trying to find that name? Do you use the "Find" option with a search term from something else linked to the character? Even if you type "XXX" or "Bad Guy" into the scene and highlight it so you can keep going, you'll eventually have to backtrack through your manuscript to edit in the change. Yikes!

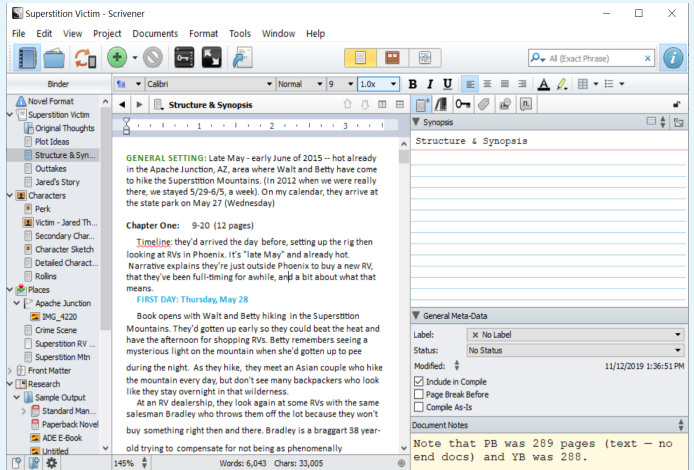
Two primary tools keep my butterflies from straying too far.

Because I write mysteries, timeline can be a crucial element. I tried various options until I landed on an inexpensive software program called *AnyTime Organizer* (by Individual Software, Inc.).



If I died tomorrow and someone found it, they'd be surprised to find things in the daily appointments like "Body found." The calendar function not only allows me to track what happens to my characters day-by-day, but the appointment book, notes and journal sections provide space for more details.

In 2016 I gifted myself with Scrivener, a writing tool using a binder structure. For \$42 I got a CD (to avoid relying on wi-fi, although that's an option). It can be used for drafting and manuscript creation, but I prefer to use Scrivener's binder functionality, and create a new one for each book. Maybe *EverNote* or *OneNote* works for you.



Yet another option is to create a folder in Word (or your writing software of choice) with a series of documents to track different details. A physical three-ring binder to capture specifics is a great non-tech alternative (I confess I have one of these, too).

What you use isn't as important as how you use it. Organization is key. Create separate files or binder sections for categories such as major characters, minor characters, setting, plot ideas, chapter-by-chapter outline, and timeline.

No detail is unimportant: physical descriptions of the characters, the vehicles they drive, their alma maters—anything can turn out to be important later on, so record it here as you draft so you can find it again should you need it.

These "story bibles" are especially handy for those of us working on a series: keeping details like Walt and Betty's kids' and grandkids' ages has been a particular challenge for me, so one page in my "bible" is dedicated to those offspring.

How might a story bible help you?

*Ellen Behrens' short stories, articles, essays, and reviews have been widely published. Her third Rollin RV Mystery, **Superstition Victim**, is now available. If you'd like a free copy for review purposes, please e-mail ellenbehr@aol.com with your request. Learn more about her books at www.ellenbooks.com.*

Blasting Rock

by Ellen Behrens

Ernest Hemingway once wrote, “*There is no rule on how to write. Sometimes it comes easily and perfectly; sometimes it’s like drilling rock and then blasting it out with charges.*”

And sometimes it’s both, in one book. Trust me. I just went through that with my new novel, *Superstition Victim*.

SV is the third novel in my Rollin RV Mystery series, which features full-time RVers Walt and Betty Rollin. After spending the first book in North Carolina and the second in Yuma, Arizona, the Rollins’ were due for something different but in keeping with their penchant for stumbling into situations requiring them to solve a local murder. Because I have ideas for future plots requiring them to make some changes in the way they travel, I knew they’d be buying a new RV during the course of the novel.

The plots of the first two books were generated from specific settings, but this time I had situations without a setting. I was immediately stymied. So many choices! I considered and discarded Seattle, Los Angeles, even Boise, or sending Walt and Betty back to Yuma. Finally I invented an RV dealership in the metro Phoenix area while parking the Rollins’ fifth wheel near the Superstition Mountains.

That decision made, I headed Walt and Betty up a hiking trail into the mountains in the first pages. So much mystery in these hills—should the book be about that? Should it be about something that happens to them while they’re hiking? Or, because the Rollins would be in and out of dealerships, should I tackle the something related to the RV industry?

I hemmed and hawed on the page. I made mind maps and threw them away. I started and stopped. The “easily, perfectly” part of writing this book was over and done, that much was clear.

What to do? In my case: nothing. For awhile, I just let the book sit. I felt guilty at first. I was running late with it, I should be working on it, I needed to finish it, I wasn’t going to be able to work on later books until I got through this one. Recriminations looped through my head.

Finally I decided the only way past blaming myself for not working on the book was to finish it, regardless of whether I ended up with a good book or a bad book. So I hunkered down and went to work. Again.

I wrote with abandon: added characters, sent one into missing status, charged ahead. Hemingway’s “easily” part of writing was back. Eventually, I finished it.

Then: oh, no.

Ecstatic relief at finishing the draft transformed into despair at having written something with so many flaws. Threads left dangling. Plot shifts without explanation or character motivation. Problems seemed pervasive.

I had to drill through that rock, pulverize those problems. I sharpened my drill bit. I started at the beginning, honing the language, re-shaping the scenes.

Should character X be good or bad? Was character Y in on things or not? I shifted sections, expanded others, incorporated new ideas, tossed others. Again—done! Was it finally ready for the general public?

I ordered a print copy so I could read it aloud to my husband. And there it was: the truth. The opening was dull. Some parts repeated others. Other sections were unclear—cutting and pasting so much meant pieces and parts had fallen off the page, leading to confusion. I dog-eared nearly every page in the book, marking everything from missing punctuation to complete scene shifts.

I needed to blast it, as Hemingway would say. I buckled down again. But this time I knew what needed to be done. First, I pulled the scene with the RV salesman from later in the chapter and thrust it front and center. I condensed the original opening scene into a flashback. The decisions I’d made with little confidence were changed, and those I could see were working were fortified.

My rule for drafting has always been *You can’t mess up a draft*. You can’t mess it up because—by nature—it’s already messed up. The important thing is to keep drilling and blasting, shaping and honing. Through revision and editing, through perseverance and diligence, a book eventually emerges.

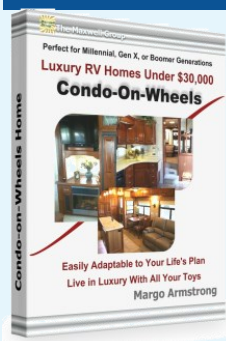
And then it’s finally, really *done*!

P.S.

Revealing more of the decisions I made during revisions would give too much of the plot away, but if you’ve read Superstition Victim and would like more background about the revision process for this novel, feel free to contact me at ellenbehr@aol.com.



From the Editor



Just released on Amazon, my latest book, **"Condo-on-Wheels, Luxury RV Home Under \$30,000"**

With all the insecurities about climate change, job stability, and scary games being played in the political world, it occurred to me that Americans need some type of security that changes with their needs.

If you long to own your own home but are fearful of future commitments, take a look at an unconventional option. A *Condo-on-Wheels* gives you luxury you probably could not afford in a stick-built home. These residential fifth wheels offer beautiful cherry or oak wood interiors, plush carpeting, complete kitchens, and come completely furnished.

In my book I feature several floorplans that are available including 2 bedrooms and 1.5 baths, dishwashers, and patios. If you want to live with your toys, there are floorplans that include a large garage for your toys with bunks that lower from the ceiling, perfect for a family. All this for under \$30,000.

This type of home is easy to turn green, plus becomes mobile with the push of a few buttons.

Flood waters getting too high, job layoffs hit you, better opportunity elsewhere, push a few buttons and hit the road.

The pro and cons are discussed, as well as what to do when moving time comes around. A maintenance guide is included, and you can't get that with a stick-built home.

Free copies available on Amazon, March 20-22.

Please download a copy and post a review on Amazon. Thank you for your support!



Dear Penwheelers,

We are in a new era of Internet security. Several Internet Hosts (AOL, and even some Gmail. ATT, Earthlink clients) are refusing to accept the Newsletter notification. When the *Penwheels Newsletter* is published and ready for downloading, check our group at **RVillage.com**. [4x a year: March 1, June 1, September 1 and December 1.]

About the Penwheels Newsletter

To keep our Penwheels BOF group dues-free to writers on the move, I donate space on my server host for the *Penwheels Newsletter* archive to make it convenient for those in the RV lifestyle to download the newsletter.

I edit, pull together and publish the newsletter four times a year. Many thanks to Joanne Alexakis, Jamie Bruzenak, and Ellen Behrens for their contributions that make this complicated system work. Thanks too for all the members that have contributed to the content over the years.

The Penwheels BOF has currently 90 members, more than half of those members joined in the last couple of years. The RV lifestyle is a good fit for writers of all genres, so our numbers should continue to increase.

- ♦ Want a Q&A section in the Newsletter? Submit articles or send me questions. Ask about writing, promotion or publishing topics.
- ♦ Send me your new book press release (ready to publish, please), tips on good deals on print or book covers, any publishing scams circulating, or gossip re: publishing houses about to fail.
- ♦ Commit to a column featuring writing tips about your genre. See our newsletter for examples. (4x a year, 200-500 words, fiction or non-fiction.)

How to Join the Escapees BOF Penwheels on RVillage

RVillage.com is **free** to join. Currently, they make their money through ads and donations. RVillage provides our group with a free communication tool for our members and a social media environment for the RV lifestyle.

Below are detailed current (Feb 2020) instructions on HOW TO join RVILLAGE.COM, then join the PENWHEELS GROUP:

Sign up [required fields]:

Email, Password, Nickname [used as your online ID], Referral source: *Feel free to use my name, Margo Armstrong*

The "Welcome to RVillage" page displays.

Select "Groups" from the toolbar and scroll down to the **Advanced Search => Search For a Group** field. Enter **Penwheels**.

Scroll down and click **Escapees BOF-Penwheels =>** the Penwheels page displays, click the green button, **JOIN GROUP**.

One Way to Beat Writers Block

Ever find yourself in a creative log jam? Start with these tips and see if they work for you.

1. Inspiration
2. What do you have to start with?
3. Nonsense
4. Meaning
5. What's Going On Here?

[Read on . . .](#)

How to Avoid Stereotypes

Coming up with characters can be as simple as looking to our subject matter and asking ourselves who might be expected to be involved. But that only creates the expected characters—predictable and uninteresting. We must build on that idea.

Building characters that are intriguing, unusual, and memorable is a different task altogether. Here's a method you can use to break away from standard characters and sculpt them into far more interesting people, step by step.

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

What Drives Characters?

As writers, we all know that characters need drive or their actions will come across as unmotivated. But what is drive, and where does it come from?

At a minimum, every character needs a reason to explain the choices they make and the things they do. For example, the ex-con who has made a new life going straight takes on one more job because his daughter needs a surgery he can't afford.

Or, a mother of three who is belittled and abused by her husband falls deeply in love with a man she met in a chance encounter but can't bring herself to run away with him because she was abandoned by her own mother as a child.

These motivations are enough to satisfy the basic need to understand what drives each character, yet the reasons given still seem unrealistically simple, superficial, or just too pat. [More . . .](#)

Introducing Characters

When your reader/audience first meets your characters in a story, it has the same effects as when you are introduced to someone in real life. First impressions have a tremendous impact that you can use either to establish or mislead your reader/audience as to the true nature of each character.

You might tell your reader/audience all there is to know about a particular character right up front. But for another character, you may drop little bits of information over the whole course of the story. And, of course, you want to note how a character's outlook and feelings change as the story unfolds.

Then there is the question of who shows up first? Joe, Tom, Sally, or the Monster? Characters introduced early on become more important to the reader/audience at a personal level, even though their roles may not be as significant in the story at large.

[Read on . . .](#)

The Top Five Confusion Words

The English language is rife with words that can be confused. Worse yet, spelling and grammar checkers may not catch them all. As you edit your writing, double-check the meaning of the words you use, because even seasoned writers may use a homonym in the heat of writing the first draft.

Now, let's focus on the top five sets of words that are often confused.

1. To/Too/Two

To is a preposition that means headed toward or for and is also used in a verb infinitive. "Jim is going to the gym."

Too is an adverb of degree. "I'm going to the gym too!" or "You go to the gym too much."

And two is a number. "The two of them went to the gym together."

[Read on . . .](#)

World of Publishing

A Plague of Publishing and Marketing Scams

Writer Beware's Victoria Strauss strikes again at the heart of publishing scams.

The latest scam phenomenon to hit the writing world: fake publishing and marketing companies that, through outrageous prices and worthless services, extract enormous amounts of money from unwary writers.

Based in the Philippines (despite their apparent US addresses, phone numbers, and telemarketer names) and focusing primarily on small press and self-published authors (particularly authors who've published with one of the *Author Solutions* imprints), these companies recruit writers with relentless--and highly deceptive--phone and email solicitations.

Some do provide the services authors pay for, albeit at seriously inflated prices and often of poor quality. Others just take the money and run. I'm hearing from a growing number of writers who've paid five figures in fees to one—or, in some cases, more than one—of these scams, with next to nothing to show for it.

[Read on . . .](#)

Is Someone Online Trashing You

Bad press really can be good press. When you are attacked by an unknown adversary, you **MUST** come out swinging. The absolutely worst thing you can do is to ignore the negative posts, and hope people will just forget some day.

If you are absolutely certain that the woman who owns that website is the one posting the comments, your offensive actions should include:

1. Posting a page on your website featuring legitimate customer reviews. If you did not solicit those comments from your customers, state, at the top of that page, that they are "Unsolicited Customer Testimonials." That is very important.
2. Posting an article on your own blog telling the story about what your competitor has done to you. Don't be afraid to include information on how much she has hurt you, caused you lost sleep, etc.

Personalizing the story will get far more attention.

3. Grab a BIG cup of coffee, and start posting responses to ALL the negative reviews she has posted about you. Simple go to those websites, and click on the option to "respond" or "comment" under her scam posts. I would write it something like this:

[More . . .](#)

How I Use Diversity (and a Pseudonym) to Keep My Writing Business Alive!

Recently, I've heard of a few writers giving up the ghost, or at least publicly bemoaning their financial situation. Apparently, being a writer doesn't automatically grant you fame and fortune. Who knew?

While hearing about hard-working people struggling is never nice, it isn't really surprising. Times are hard in every industry, why would writing and publishing be any different? Of course, we would all like to barricade ourselves in our ivory towers, immersing ourselves in the projects of our choosing.

Unfortunately, there are very few writers in such a privileged position. The rest of us get by any which way we can. We all have a unique skill set. We all have different backgrounds and interests, know different people, and operate in different circles. The trick is tapping into these things and making them work for us.

I've been writing fiction since I was a child. But, seeing very little financial reward, I gave it up in my early-twenties to focus on magazine features. It took me a long time to climb the ladder high enough to be able to make a living, and even then, a lot of the time, I was writing on the whim of an editor.

It's not all red carpets and goody bags. Writing about topics you neither know nor care about with enough authority and enthusiasm to hook the reader is a skill unto itself.

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

Swing Into Spring

Let's make 2020 count. Set our sights on publishing that next (or first) book, then get organized. With very little investment, that book can hit the market. Next is the hard part, figuring out the best marketing approach. Watch out for scams and get busy.