



Summer 2023

# ESCAPEES B.O.F. For Writers ...Published or Not

## Facebook Group Info

RVillage might have abandoned its groups, but we have not abandoned you! Dedicated Penwheelers Jaimie Bruzenak and Marguerita McManus jumped in and set up a new forum for us on Facebook when RVillage closed up a few months ago. Many thanks to you both!

Haven't joined yet? Here's the group link:  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/591028212965105>

You will need to answer a few questions to join -- no biggie (we're just trying to keep the group a little focused). Once in the group, please introduce yourself. Watch for postings similar to those we used to make on RVillage. We hope you'll make this your spot to connect and converse about all things writing, traveling, SKPing!

Do keep in mind that Facebook (as all blogs and forums do) have certain restrictions on use and by using the site you agree to certain terms and conditions (please read those on the site). This is important, especially if you're thinking of posting something original you've written, photos you want to retain copyrights on, etc.

Questions or issues trying to get onto the site? Facebook savvy? We'd love your help! Please contact Marguerita McManus [[mm3458@gmail.com](mailto:mm3458@gmail.com)] for assistance or to lend a hand.

Not a fan of Facebook? No problem! We'll continue to send out announcements and copies of the newsletter via e-mail; just make sure Ellen [[ellenbehr@aol.com](mailto:ellenbehr@aol.com)] has your current e-mail address.

## Editor's Note

Wow! Quite a lot has been going on behind the scenes between the Spring issue and this one. See "Facebook Group Info" for details on how to join the new Penwheels online forum.

The Spring issue was barely out before submissions for the 2023 Win-Win contest started coming in. If you've thought about submitting to this newsletter, give in to the urge! (See the last page for details.)

We're thrilled to introduce a new columnist: Marguerita McManus has agreed to provide her insights and marketing experience in "Market Share." Welcome, Marguerita!

Our regular columnists are back, PLUS we have additional essays and articles from many of your fellow members. I'm sure you join me in sending heartfelt thanks to them for investing their time so we can benefit from their wisdom!

If you have ideas, suggestions, comments or submissions, please drop me a line. I'd love to hear from you!

Happy hiking, biking, reading on the porch or beach... and may all your writing go smoothly!

*Ellen*



## Inside this Issue...

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## ***Braggin' Rights***

*from Joanne Alexakis*



In the March/April 2023 *Escapees* magazine, Darlene Miller (SKP#50781) sings praises to her home state's annual Tulip Festival in Pella, Iowa. Besides the tulips, she applauds highly regarded tourist sights: the Tulip Toren (tower), the Dutch Historical Village, the Vermeer Windmill, and the Klokkenspel 147 carillon bells. Darlene also lists various RV parks available to visitors (page 20).

*Have you recently published something? Spread the news! Let Joanne know so we can all celebrate!*

### **Looking for a great book fair or festival?**

Writer's Digest hears you! Here's a link to a list of events organized by state:

<https://www.writersdigest.com/publishing-insights/list-of-book-fairs-and-book-festivals-by-state>

## ***Jaimie's Tips***

*from Jaimie Bruzenak*



If you have paid one of the many self-publishing companies to publish your book, beware of this scam mentioned in *Writers Weekly*, February 23, 2023.

<https://writersweekly.com/ask-the-expert/my-publisher-went-out-of-business-and-a-different-publisher-then-contacted-me>

Looking to write with others? Zoom makes it possible! Check out FREE writing sessions through The Narrative Method here:

<https://www.thenarrativemethod.org/new-calendar-page>

Do you think weird things? Have quite the imagination? There might be a market for your weirdness! See the 4/21/23 Writer's Weekly article, "4 Markets that Pay Writers for Weird Stories." <https://writersweekly.com/marketing-secrets/4-markets-that-pay-writers-for-weird-stories-by-rachel-carrington>

One or more of these publications might be interested in travel with a disability in an RV. See the May 12, 2023 article, "Paying Disability Markets for Writers."

<https://writersweekly.com/this-weeks-article/8-paying-disability-markets-for-writers-by-karoki-githure>

## ***Curious About AI?***

Artificial intelligence (AI) is all over the news. Some writers have embraced it as a way to supercharge their writing (see one writer's experience here: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/could-an-ai-chatbot-rewrite-my-novel>), while publishers are closing the door to open submissions because they don't want to risk publishing something using AI and therefore plagiarizing another writer's work (<https://www.candlemarkandgleam.com/about/submissions-2/>).

Hope Clark, in her popular FundsforWriters newsletter (if you're not a subscriber and are serious about publishing, you should sign up: <http://www.fundsforwriters.com>) is also filtering submissions: "Any articles that come to FundsforWriters seeking publication, that can be suspected of being AI written (no personal experiences, no unique anecdotes, too generalized) will be rejected for giving the appearance of AI. We are already getting a certain type of article that has come from at least two dozen writers in the last month, that clearly has been run through an AI program from the generalization of the message."

In work as tough as writing can be, it's tempting to take a shortcut. When it comes to AI, it sounds as though this is a shortcut that could shortchange you in the long run! (I do believe I have mixed my metaphors! ☺)



## ***Fiction Tips: Characters We Love to Hate***

*by Debra S. Sanders*



An effective story is propelled by conflict between the protagonist and a person, animal, or event. Writers devote countless hours to perfecting the main character's arc as he/she overcomes challenges and grows from the experience. Unfortunately, the instigator of that conflict, the antagonist, is often neglected. That's a shame. A complex villain can be fun to write.

In "No Country for Old Men," Anton Chigurh is a fascinating hitman with perverse principles who can kill without mercy or cruelty because he is void of emotion. Life and death are awarded on the flip of a coin.

Hannibal Lecter in Thomas Harris's four-book series offers another intriguing example. Harris crafts a mesmerizing, intelligent murderer with a penchant for human flesh. "Silence of the Lambs" became an Oscar-winning film, generating public fascination with the character. But the third book, "Hannibal" divided readers. FBI agent, Clarice Starling and Dr. Lecter become romantically involved, a twist that shocked some fans and delighted others.

Love or hate him, Hannibal Lecter is a memorable character who still intrigues readers. That's the impact of a well-developed villain.

Not all antagonists are serial killers or irredeemable. A neighborhood bully can be compelling if given an interesting backstory. "Bad" characters are necessary for a good story. They add conflict which drives the narrative. Hannibal Lecter and Anton Chigurh both follow a twisted morality that prompts their heinous actions. They hide sinister intent behind a façade of normality—and could pass as your next-door neighbor.

To create an intriguing villain, start with a character profile identifying motives, insecurities, and goals, no matter how depraved. You must understand your antagonist's impulses and what triggers their actions. Layering in past trauma or painful memories humanizes them so readers don't see a monster but rather a person capable of monstrous acts. A relationship with the protagonist is a useful scenario that plants an ominous threat in readers' minds.

Villains can be fun and darkly entertaining with likable qualities that hide a driven, ruthless agenda. Or they can be cruel because they have been treated cruelly. Or brilliant masterminds like Dr. Moriarty, Sherlock Holmes's nemesis, who respects his opponent and enjoys the competitive pursuit. They may have suffered a loss that changed how they relate to others. Antagonists can be driven by power, revenge, hurt, or simply a dispassionate need to witness human pain.

Regardless of motive, your antagonist should be unique and authentic. Readers relate to both hero and anti-hero in a powerful story. Your villain will challenge the protagonist's strengths. Erode their confidence. Present seemingly unsolvable problems that launch an "all is lost" moment.

When an author composes a convincing, ruthless antagonist to make their hero's life a living hell, the story will be emotionally charged and keep readers invested to the end.

***Debra S. (Deb) Sanders lives in southern Arizona where she embraces the Old West, seeks out good hiking trails, and pens cozy mysteries and thrilling tales late into the night. You can learn more about her books and adventures at***

***<https://debsanders.com>***





## Marisa's Member Profile: Margo Armstrong

Margo Armstrong has over 20 books under her belt, an endless supply of travel adventures, and is considering one more career ahead of her. Life after 80 still has plenty of excitement ahead—and life at 80 means a wealth of experiences to date.



In her 28 years of RV travel, Margo accumulated stories and connections that often led to book development. Fellow RVers would share ideas, Margo would consider, and another book would add to her collection. You can—and should!—check out the fabulous spread of ebooks from her Amazon author page here: [amazon.com/author/margoarmstrong](https://amazon.com/author/margoarmstrong).

Writing on the road went best when she sat at the desk in her beautiful fifth wheel—a quiet, open view kept the wheels turning and the books flowing. The view from one of her favorite parks was one we can all envy—San Diego On The Bay gave her an ideal place for a productive day's writing. Unfortunately for us RVers, the area has been taken over by a hotel, so the sea views are harder to come by. Thankfully though, Margo spent enough time there to turn out some great books (and reminisce on the beauty so that we can still enjoy it vicariously through her).

During her active RV years, she'd often limit travel days to 4 hours, maybe with the occasional stop for some avocado on a tortilla (delicious and healthy!), then get settled in at her new stop for maximum time in place.

Margo's writing and travel combined in ways to make all of our RV lives better—from her blog, MovingOnWithMargo.com, to her podcast, RV Lifestyle Expert (available where you find your podcasts!), the stories and advice are abundant and delightful. Up until last year, she also ran her publishing company, The Maxwell Group, and the website RV Lifestyle Experts—so many avenues that shared her insight with the broader community.

As for her own growth and development, a book that's sticking with her recently is *Remaining Calm When Everyone Around You Is In Panic Mode*, and to be sure those are likely tips and tricks that could do us all some good—much like Margo's books!

Writing has been, to quote directly, "my life, my love, and my satisfaction" so you know the things she has to say will resonate. Between a prolific writing career, amazing travel, a fantastic son, and a long-time partner, Margo has had an incredible life that is far from over.

We can't wait to see what she does next!

**Marisa Wolf has been writing since the age of six when she penned and illustrated "Sarah and the Idaho Potatoes." A science fiction and fantasy novelist, Marisa's latest novel, *Ally*, is now available. She and her husband have been full-timing for over two years. Find out more about her books at [marisawolf.net](http://marisawolf.net).**

Editor's Note: Many of us have benefited from Margo's generosity. She edited this newsletter for many years; now that I've been at this a little while, I can appreciate the dedication and commitment that took. If you're actively RVing, you owe it to yourself to peruse her books! And don't miss her "World of Publishing" column on the next page.





## *World of Publishing: Truth, Fiction, or Fantasy with AI* *by Margo Armstrong*

Back in May of 2022, Chuck Woodbury wrote an article in RVTravel.com that opened my eyes to our latest threat to TRUTH. He bought their first Artificial Intelligence software for use on his blog. He named it Johnny Robot.

I am linking it [here](#) so you can read the article for yourself. His opinion of this software echoes mine.

In Woodbury's approach to help his readers understand the current issue, he includes an article written 96% by Johnny Robot. Know that the knowledge he is passing on to you may seem comical but should be treated with the upmost respect.

With the use of this new technology, content creators all over the world are already spinning out articles full of half-truths or outright lies. Any person with the ability to type can create information that usually takes hours to prepare, but now takes minutes. With no way for this new content creator to detect errors in judgment, who knows what tale AI spins.

What path will writers take using this new technology? Truth, fiction, or fantasy?

Yes, **artificial intelligence** cops are on the scene. Fake news has often been found to share the same root, which is the place of origin before the spread of disinformation.

The Fandango project, funded by the EU, for example, takes stories that have been flagged as fake by human fact-checkers and then searches for social media posts or online pages that have similar words or claims. This allows the journalists and experts to trace the fake stories to their roots and weed out all the potential threats before they can spread out of control.

Still, the future of professional writers seems uncertain. Will the "AI cops" be enough? Will writers with AI capability flood the market? Will AI insure a 5 star rating on Amazon? Will this technology be the savior for bad writers worldwide? Stay tuned.

*Margo Armstrong is the author and publisher of over [10 books](#) now available on Amazon. Her book ["Writing and Publishing Books for Fun and Profit"](#) is available in eBook and print format. Listen to her podcast "RV Lifestyle Expert" on your favorite podcast platform (now available on Amazon Music). Her blog can be found at [MovingOnWithMargo.com](#).*

### *Grammar Quiz*

Heard on a local TV news station: "She continued her passion of dance...." What's the correct way to say (or write) this? BONUS: Why??

[\[Answer on page 10\]](#)



### **Little Free Library**

San Juan Capistrano, CA

*(Many thanks to Jaimie!)*



## *Market Share: Have You Run Ads on Amazon? by Marguerita McManus*



The theory with any marketing is, "you have to spend money to make money." Although readers and buyers are everywhere, Amazon is a good place to start if you are new to running ads. I'd like to share my results and I'd love to know your experiences.

If you look at your book for sale on Amazon, you might notice a related book with the word Sponsored featured right under your book description. If you scroll down, you may see a panel of books with the title "Products related to this item," which are also sponsored ads. Someone has paid to put their book in those spots, hoping to catch the viewer's eye and make a sale.

In 2020 I enrolled in a free class, via Facebook, run by Bryan Cohen, an author who has made it his mission to teach other authors how to run Amazon Ads. He's been so successful that Amazon now partners with him. His book on this topic is titled, *Self-Publishing with Amazon Ads: The Author's Guide to Lower Costs, Higher Royalties, and Greater Peace of Mind* (\$3.99/Kindle). If you'd rather try Amazon's guide it's here: <https://advertising.amazon.com/en-us/library/guides/advertising-books-on-amazon-authors/>. While taking Bryan's course I developed a deep appreciation for his honest assessment of what works and what doesn't, based upon his many years of experience. He also offers a paid class for learning the process.

The gist of the idea is to use the right ad keywords to show your book (to people who are searching) along with the book they searched for. There really is a science to Amazon keyword marketing and not all marketers agree on tactics. Bryan encourages his students to run ads for at least three months. Here are my results, using Bryan's strategy.

*[Continued on page 12]*

Take a look at Tiffany Yates Martin's quick, nifty **review of common punctuation errors and how to correct them**, written in a style that's much more entertaining than our old grammar book:

<https://writerunboxed.com/2023/03/07/assuaging-the-pain-of-punctuation/>

Word of the Day Quarter

Eucatastrophe (pronounced yoo-kə-TAS-trə-fee):  
A sudden and favorable resolution of events in a story.

(Thank you, Jaimie!)

Wonder how successful writers manage to get so much accomplished? Maybe they have a better routine.  
Find out: [famouswritingroutines.com](https://famouswritingroutines.com)



# *The Fine Art of Windsurfing*

*by Janice Lasko*

Our friends were all doing it. Windsurfing, that is. They proclaimed, "It's easy to learn ... " They didn't finish the sentence ... It's easy to learn, but difficult to master. It was another, "oh, heck, why not moment," for us. And, it didn't take long to be convinced that this would be a much less expensive sport than skiing.

Here's our thinking: One windsurfing board, one sail, one mast, one boom, and one harness. **Cost-\$500.** There was no charge to catch the wind and there was no cost to windsurf in the ocean. When it was windy, we'd take turns sharing our one set of equipment.

There was one problem: I didn't know port from starboard. Tacking into the wind and other nautical and sailing terms meant nothing to me. Gabby, on the other hand, had been in the submarine service during World War II. Being on and under the water was nothing new to him. He knew the terminology.

Therefore, it was imperative that I take windsurfing lessons in a bay. Tied to a tether, the instructor pulled me back to shore whenever I shrugged my shoulders wondering what in the heck he was talking about, which was often. **Cost** for the lessons-**\$150.** **Cost** to park the car in the private bay parking lot-**\$100** for four weeks.

In frustration, the instructor sold me a book of nautical terms with pictures to study before my second lesson. It helped ... a little. **Cost** of the book-**\$25.95.**

However, when I was taking a lesson, I was using our equipment and Gabby had nothing with which to sail. **Cost** to rent-**\$75** a week for four weeks. **Total: \$300.**

After those four weeks were up, I could stand on the board, hold the sail up, and with a firm grip on the boom, was able to move the sail and mast back and forth enough to catch a slight breeze. Sometimes I dared to gingerly step around the mast, turning the board in the opposite direction.

After being taken off the tether, I was often caught in a spot of the bay named the Black Hole. The docks, anchored boats, and hi-rise apartment buildings cut off the wind and made it impossible for a novice sailor to do anything other than go in circles. Once caught in the Black Hole, there was no getting out unless someone came to my rescue.

At last, I graduated from Windsurfing Sailing Class – I even received a 'Master Sailor' card to prove I was deemed fit to sail in the ocean. Ooo-eee, was I proud.

We found the perfect spot for our introduction to ocean sailing: near a lifeguard station and other windsurfers, many of whom looked like beginners. Gabby rigged the sail and said he would check things out. He paddled past the waves, stood on the board, unrolled and pulled the sail up. Whoosh; he was sailing.

I could see only his backside as he sailed parallel to the shore, but I knew the grin on his face was as wide as a dolphin's jaw. He carefully stepped around the mast and caught the wind in the other direction, returning to our spot on the beach.

"Nothing to it," he said. "You're gonna' love it. Repeat after me: "Stay parallel to the shore."

With the sail re-rolled around the mast and lying on the board, I stretched out on top of the rigging and paddled through the waves. The wind was coming up but nothing to worry about. After all, I had my 'Master Sailor' card, proving I knew what I was doing.

I managed to duplicate Gabby's actions but instead of holding the sail safely away from the water, before I could pull the sail upright, water poured onto the sail and completely filled it. As I was taught in my lesson, I began to slowly spill the water by dragging the boom toward me a little bit at a time. Splat! Into the ocean I went hitting the board with bones and muscles I didn't know I had.

The waves took the board out of my reach. Swimming to catch up, I climbed back on, grabbed the rope and, again, tried pulling the sail out of the water. After about four more attempts, I finally succeeded in standing and holding the sail correctly. I was sailing!

I turned my head looking back at Gabby. I saw only a dot that looked like it was waving at me. I was hanging on for dear life ... there was no waving back.

With the wind at my back, I kept on sailing. Oh, what a feeling. A little tack here and there, I had mastered the fine art of windsurfing until I looked up and saw I was running into the side of a Japanese tanker.

***[OH, NO! How will Janice survive this?!? See page 13 to find out!]***





# Cavalry Ghosts

by Lynn Leistikow

*Ft. Davis, TX.* -- It was late afternoon and the setting sun was casting a warm glow on the fort as we rode up. Dismounting, we walked through the gate and saw the troops of the 10<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry and the 25<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry being inspected by their officers. The 25<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry Regimental Band was ready to strike a note upon completion of the inspection of the troops. The ceremony about to take place was the evening Retreat Parade.

The hoof beats of the officer's horses and the orders to the companies to "parade rest" rang sharp and clear in the stillness of the fort. The band played "Hail Columbia" as it marched in full length of the assembled troops and back to its original position.

The bugler played "Retreat" and the evening gun was fired. We were so engrossed in the professionalism of the ceremony we jumped, startled, when the gun was fired. The company commanders ordered their companies to "present arms." The movement of the troops and their slapping of rifles were done with such precision that it almost sounded as one instead of hundreds.

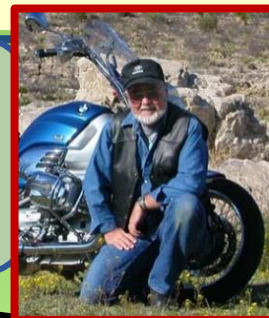
The bugler then played "To the Color" and the flag was lowered, during which the band played "The Star Spangled Banner." After all the troops were accounted for, the day's general orders were read. The death of former President Andrew Johnson was announced along with the honors to be paid him by the garrison.

Across the parade ground, officers' homes stood in a neat row facing the troops. Several wives and children stood on their verandas watching the formal proceedings of the Retreat Parade. After the Commanding Officer dismissed the troops, the band continued to play until the parade ground was cleared.

At the end of the ceremony, silence descended on the fort and we slowly opened our eyes and realized this entire scene was imagined. Our tour of Fort Davis National Monument was so realistic that when the tape of the Retreat Parade was played over the loud speakers at dusk it took us back to the year of 1875 when this was an active fort. We stood silent and still for a few moments, looked at each other and smiled as we walked back to the motorcycle and rode away with scenes of the past forever embedded in our memories.

**Lew Leistikow shares here an essay by his late wife Lynn "who began to get me to get out of the 'only the facts' rut and put more imagination into my/our writing." Lew says. Lew has been RVing since the 1960s, touring the country in a variety of vehicles.**

**See his full profile by Marisa Wolf in the Fall 2022 issue.**



*You just have to go on when it is worst and most helpless—there is only one thing to do with a novel and that is to go straight on through to the end of the damn thing.*

— Ernest Hemingway to F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1929 when FSF was struggling with writer's block while working on Tender Is the Night

**Give in to the temptation to share...**

**Submit for each issue by these deadlines:**

Fall Issue:	Aug 15
Winter Issue:	Nov 15
Spring Issue:	Feb 15
Summer Issue:	May 15

**Publication is on the first of the next month.**





# The Ultimate Camping Spot for Us

by Gerhard Spangenberg

The most memorable camping spot was on the Fishhook Trailhead off the Fishhook-Willow Road in the Palmer, Alaska, area. It was on the way to the Independence Mine State Historical Park that this very large paved empty parking area appeared out of nowhere.

We were ready for lunch and pulled in parallel to the outermost edge. Looking out of our windows a most mind capturing vista developed. We stepped outside and were mesmerized by an endless view down a valley cradled by long impressive mountain ranges still wearing white hats left by the winter snow. The colors varied from light green from the newly awakening flora in the valleys to dark green from ageless forestation along the upper slopes to gray from the jagged bare peaks with white tops. All was contrasted against a light blue sky.

We pulled out our portable canvas chairs and a rolled-up portable table from the RV compartments. The outside lunch was very long and solemn, interrupted only by the captivating views and small talk.

We did see the Independence mine using our towed car, but spend two days at this beautiful spot. We hiked up the nearby large hill and took in the crisp air along the way.

The second day a paraglider landed here, and a young girl on a skateboard rolled all over the parking area wind powered by an overhead para kite.



They were father and daughter and offered a unique opportunity for friendly conversation. Overall Alaska was filled with endless incredible and memorable sights and was the most RV friendly state we ever visited.



Gary and his wife have been RVing since 1967 (nearly 60 years!!) and has recently started devoting more time to writing about those 180,000+ miles. Read Marisa's profile of him in the Spring 2022 issue.



# *The Kindness of Strangers*

*by Jim Hendrickson*

A few years ago, as a member of the RV club Boondockers Welcome, I met Bob, his wife Betsy, and their big and lively poodle Beatrice by staying in my rig on their beautiful Oregon farm overlooking snow-covered mountains in the far distance. On my recent second stay, after wintering in Southern Arizona and heading to my summer residence in a Washington state RV park, sadly I learned of Betsy's passing. Bob was now living with Beatrice in their huge toy hauler which houses a rugged motorcycle attached to a sidecar (for the pooch, no less).

I brought along the biggest apple pie I could find at the store, as a small token of my great appreciation for Bob's advice: apply for U.S. Veteran's benefits based on my honorable early medical discharge from the Army in which I had served exactly sixty years ago. Back then, I had no idea that I was actually a Veteran! As a Veteran's Service Officer, however, Bob convinced me that I was indeed, a Veteran, and he urged me to begin a year-long process, which ended successfully: I am now an official 30% disabled U.S. Veteran!

Since I have been traveling the world, visiting over 155 countries since my discharge, I have met and have become friends with many kind folks like Bob. Recently, I saw an excellent movie (*The Kindness of Strangers*) on a DVD borrowed from my local library. Bob is the epitome of kindness as exemplified by many kind folks featured in that marvelous, heartfelt film. At first, we were strangers, then friends. He helped me in my need; he was there with good advice, which gave me the courage, confidence and effort to take action.

As Bob, Beatrice and I gathered around a campfire on their farm, the sun set gradually over the mountains, and we enjoyed a slice of delicious warm apple pie. To top it off, it just happened to be Easter Sunday! What a wonderful blessing!

**Jim Hendrickson has traveled in over 150 countries (it helps he speaks six languages "plus smatterings" of another six) and has been teaching and writing for many years, publishing several dozen books, primarily foreign language textbooks. He earned his PhD in Psycholinguistics from The Ohio State University, so, by rights, we should probably be calling him "Doctor Jim."**

## **SURPRISING BOOK FACTS**

33% of High School Graduates never read another book the rest of their lives

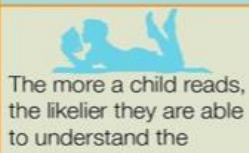


42% of college grads never read another book after college

57% of new books are not read to completion

70% of US adults have not been in a book-store the last five years

The more a child reads, the likelier they are able to understand the emotions of others



80% of US families did not buy or read a book last year

Reading one hour per day in your chosen field will make you an international expert in 7 years.

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## **Grammar Quiz Answer**

The sentence should have read:  
"She continued her passion **for** dance...."

Why? "For" means "concerning" (or "relating to") whereas "of" means "from." She didn't have a passion from dance, but for it, right?

This is one of those American expressions most people learn from a lot of reading. ☺



## *In the Rearview Mirror*

*by Charlie Parker, Guest Contributor*

A retrospective view can sometimes be very informative. As I sit here in our new home I can see the last few years with total clarity. It has been more than 12 ½ years since Gayle and I began our journey as full time RVers.

Our RVing adventures go much further back. I began mine in 1965 when I moved into an Airstream trailer while attending Fresno State. A tap on the shoulder from Uncle Sam during the Viet Nam war brought that adventure to a quick and abrupt halt. Not wanting to "slop through the mud" of a tropical forest in Southeast Asia I opted to volunteer for the US Navy. That is a four year chunk of my life I would not trade for anything—nor would I want to do it again in today's world environment.

After the navy jaunt I did several small short term employment endeavors until I landed a job with the State of California on May 2, 1972. That turned into a career that lasted close to 33 years.

Gayle and I met in 1977 while both of us were furthering our educations at night school. We both finished and each went on to get additional degrees. Gayle ultimately got her Masters in Counseling and had a rewarding career as a College Counselor.

We got married on May 25, 1979; we bought our first RV two weeks later—a Coleman tent trailer. We subsequently upgraded to motor homes and over the years we had four different coaches. Once we began the RV lifestyle we promised ourselves that the vehicles would not just sit in our driveways or RV garage.

We promised each other we would go away a minimum of one weekend a month and at least 10 days on a vacation to utilize and appreciate the nomadic opportunity that an RV provided. During the next 24.5 years we made hundreds of weekend trips and over 45 trips of at least a week long. No, not all were in an RV—but the RV experience also caused us to be bitten by the travel bug. We also flew to various locations and made a few cruises along the way.

In 2003 I had a quadruple by-pass surgery and during my recovery we made the best decision of our lives (other than marrying each other)—we decided to "throw in the towel; retire and hit the road."

During the last 12.5 years we have:

- Been to all fifty states, spending at least one night in each one except Delaware; nearly 4.5 months in Alaska during the summer. Our travels took us to the four furthest corners of this great country;
- Been to eight of the Canadian Provinces including a 43 day caravan to the maritime Provinces;
- Completed a 56-day caravan to Colonial Mexico which took us as far as Guadalajara, Lake Chapala & Mazatlán;
- Voyaged to various parts of the world on cruises (including 3 back to back cruises that lasted a total of 56 days). At the end of that series of cruises I asked Gayle, "Are you ready for another 56 days?" She replied "YES!" Unfortunately our wallet intervened and replied "You are not!"
- We have been to 42 or 43 of the State Capitols.
- We have visited the homes of all of the first 10 presidents plus an additional 18 presidential homes and libraries;
- Done some amazing tours including a salt mine 750 feet below the surface in Kansas, a tour of an open pit coal mine in Wyoming, several caves, numerous National Parks and monuments;
- Seen whales on numerous occasions including several pods bubble net fishing off of Cape Cod;
- Lost two of our best friends (MacGyver and Dinah) who were both with us when we began this wonderful adventure;

*[\[Continued on page 14\]](#)*





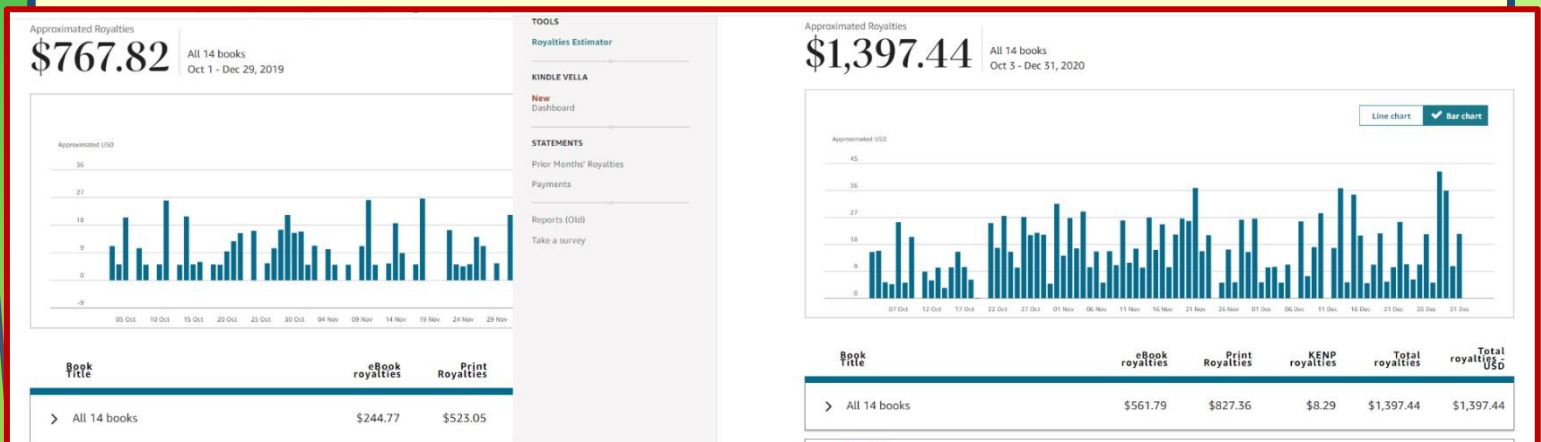
# Market Share: Have You Run Ads on Amazon?

by Marguerita McManus

[Continued from page 6]

The gist of the idea is to use the right ad keywords to show your book (to people who are searching) along with the book they searched for. There really is a science to Amazon keyword marketing and not all marketers agree on tactics. Bryan encourages his students to run ads for at least three months. Here are my results, using Bryan's strategy:

In the 3rd quarter of 2020, I almost doubled my income compared to the same quarter in 2019. It's important to note the cost as well as the increase in income: the ads I ran cost me \$267.75. My 3rd quarter 2019 income was \$767.82, however 3rd quarter income for 2020 was \$1,397.44. So, I spent under \$300 to make an additional \$700 (approx).



However, the following quarter (Jan-March 2021) was my highest sales in six years, at \$1,349.81. This is an effect that Bryan attributes to Amazon's algorithms, which notice an increase in sales, and present the book more often. So, in fact, my \$300 brought in at least \$1,200 more in sales (in the two quarters combined) than I'd have made without them. You could also attribute a part of the sales boost (they are quilting "how-to" books) to the initial impact of Covid and I wouldn't argue. Those three months of ads have been my only foray into running Amazon Ads, so far. By the 3rd quarter of 2021, my income from the same books was under \$700.

As I start releasing new books this year, I'm pulling out my notes in preparation for giving it a try again. If you've run ads on Amazon, did you find it worthwhile?

**Author Marguerita McManus writes quilting books and contemporary fiction based on life in her home state of Alaska. A snowbird RVer, she's happiest boondocking in the desert. Contact her at [MMQuilts@gmail.com](mailto:MMQuilts@gmail.com)**

**Summer Days for Writers to Celebrate**

June  
1st: National Pen Pal Day  
29th: National Work From Home Day

July  
1st: National Postal Worker Day  
10th: International Town Criers Day  
15th: National Give Something Away Day

August  
9th: National Book Lovers Day  
27th: Senior Citizens Day

# *The Fine Art of Windsurfing*

*by Janice Lasko*

*[Continued from page 7]*

Good Lord! How far had I sailed and drifted? I had nothing to judge my distance. The men on board were whistling and waving at me. Were they flirting?

Seeing no way around the ship and too exhausted to turn the board around while standing, I slid into the water and began to scissors-kick pushing the board toward shore.

Oh, poo! Was that a fin I saw streak past me? I started to shiver. What's next? I purposely had selected a blue wet suit instead of black so sharks wouldn't think I was a seal. Still, I jumped on my board and started levitating.

Suddenly the Coast Guard pulled up alongside me. Oh, thank God, I'm rescued.

But they said they had other people to rescue who were much further out to sea. They told me to sit on my board and stay put. They would be back.

"Stay put? Where in the hell was I going to go?" There I was, bobbing up and down, sitting on my board, hoping there were no more fins. Along came another small-engine boat. Not the Coast Guard, but someone Gabby found to search for me. He had described my bright yellow sail and shiny blue wet suit.

"Are you Janice?" they asked.

I tearfully nodded in the affirmative.

"Okay, then. Your husband paid us to come get you."

With a lump in my throat, I kept repeating, "Thank you," "thank you," "thank you."

They took my sail, boom, and mast onto their boat and told me to lie face down on my board and hold tight to the rope they had secured around the board. Slowly, they putted back to shore and delivered me to Gabby. **Cost** to be rescued-**\$50**. I hope the Coast Guard is still looking for me.

I learned two facts. One: Gabby hadn't been waving—he was swinging his arm in a circular pattern trying to get me to turn around and come back because a strong offshore wind had come up and was pushing many of us out to sea. And, second: the men on the ship were trying to shoo me away from their wake so I wouldn't get sucked under the tanker. Geez, during my windsurfing lessons, the instructor didn't say anything like this could happen.

From that experience, we decided lake sailing was the best way to go until I knew what I was doing and it would be wise to sail together. **Cost** for a second board and appropriate equipment-**\$650**. **Cost** for a rack to carry both boards on top of the car-**\$300**.

We continued to windsurf after we moved to Mammoth Lakes in the High Sierras. We skied in the winter and sailed in the summer. One year the seasons overlapped and in the same day, we skied in the morning and sailed that same afternoon.

We found out that high-altitude sailing was different from flatland sailing. There's less oxygen to fill the sails. Consequently, we needed different size sails and smaller boards. **Cost** for two additional sails and two boards-**\$1,550**. Gabby rigged a cradle under the fifth-wheel to carry the boards. The sails, masts, booms and wet suits, were stored in a bin attached to the roof on top of the RV. **Cost** for storage bin-**\$200**.

Do we regret the challenges of windsurfing? Not one iota. Even when we learned the miles per gallon went up about three mpg on the RV after we left all the equipment at Gabby's daughter's house—she lives in Encinitas, one block off the ocean. Our equipment now decorates the walls and ceiling of her garage.

**Total Cost** for starting to windsurf was about **\$3,825.95**, not an astronomical amount by today's standards, but in the 1970s, a high price to pay for a sport that was supposed to be free or relatively inexpensive.

Then came trips to Baja; Lake Lopez near Santa Barbara; South Padre Island, Texas; The Florida Keys; the Gorge in Oregon and other lakes; bays and ocean areas known for their steady winds. We stopped counting. Beside, there is no price we can put on the pleasure and joy we had for just one good run a day with the wind at our backs, making turns to gain speed, quickly hooking the harness to the boom and, stiff-legged, hanging our bums in the water, while skidding along. We even could sail side-by-side.

I'm delighted to report, there were no more rescues. But now I know what our friends meant when they said *easy to learn, difficult to master*.



**Janice and hubby Gabby have been full-time RVing for more than 28 years and have held 35 part-time jobs. The most rewarding job, definitely not part-time, was as Escapees magazine editor. After 14½ years, Janice retired—except for writing the occasional article for Penwheels (thank you, Janice!).**



## *In the Rearview Mirror* by Charlie Parker, Guest Contributor [Continued from page 11]

- Been wine tasting in 42 states, including some with only one winery (Nevada, Alaska, and New Hampshire).
- Oh, and one of the most important things is we have met virtually hundreds of wonderful people along the way. A great many of whom will remain friends and we will remain in contact for the rest of our lives.

Our new home is in a gorgeous modular home community in Murrieta California. As I write this I can look out our window and watch the golfers go by. Our back yard is on the 17<sup>th</sup> fairway. We have a 250-acre backyard which I do not have to mow.... YEAH!!

We had a totally unsolicited and unexpected offer to buy our motor home. It was right in the ballpark of what we hoped to get when we did sell—so we accepted.

It is with bitter sweetness and totally mixed and tumultuous emotions that I announce we have finally come off the road on a permanent basis.

As I finish this, Gayle is reading over my shoulder saying, "Come on Charlie wipe that tear off your cheek! It has been one hell-of-a-ride. It is time to turn the page and get on with the next chapter in our life!"

Now that we have spent 30+ years traveling the country to visit friends and family—it is important to point out our new home has a guest room with a private ensuite –so now it is time for others to come visit us.

## **FREE NEWSLETTERS FOR FINDING FREE eBooks!**

The Fussy Librarian has two e-newsletters: bargain e-books (usually \$2.99 and under: <https://www.thefussylibrarian.com/subscribe-to-our-bargain-ebooks-newsletter/>) and free (<https://www.thefussylibrarian.com/subscribe-to-our-free-ebooks-newsletter/>). You can set your preferences for types of books, amount of violence, whether you're okay with sexual situations, and other options. I get the bargain e-books e-newsletter in my inbox every day and when I have to skip it (because of travel or something) I try not to think about what I've missed. You can choose Kindle or Nook formats.

Freebooksy (<https://www.freebooksy.com/>) gives you the choice of Kindle, Nook, Kobo, Apple, and Google formats (if they're available) and the opportunity to select the kinds of books you want to get deals on. If you sign up for the newsletter, all the books listed (and bundles!! oooh!!) are free; if you go to the website you'll see additional books at low prices under their "Deals of the Day" section. The day I checked, all of these deals were 99 cents each.

BookLemur (<https://www.booklemur.com/>) is set up much the same way except these books are only for Kindles. BookLemur also allows writers to set up their own Spotlight page, which is a nice plus. Here's mine, if you'd like to see one: <https://www.booklemur.com/authors/ellenbehrens.html>

Ready for yet another? BookBub (<https://www.bookbub.com/welcome>) claims it offers "discounts up to 95% off and free books daily," which is actually true (from my experience, anyway). It offers Kindle, Kobo, Nook, Apple and Google Play formats for reading on "phone, tablet, Kindle, or other preferred device." Nothing like making it easy to buy something, right?

Help us all add books to our devices—share your favorite cheap/free book sites on our FB page! (And many thanks to Margo who turned me on to at least one of these sites and dozens of books ago!)





## FREE Stuff, Inspiration, and Other Goodies

We all love FREE\*, right? And here's a doozy: a 423-page PDF "Guide to Manuscript Publishers." Note that you'll be signing up to receive their newsletter when you give them your e-mail address: <https://authorspublish.com/free-book-the-2022-guide-to-manuscript-publishers/>

\* As of 5/5/2023

Wow! If you send out a newsletter to promote your writing, BookBub has some great info for you. See the results of a survey of 500+ authors on what they're doing with their author newsletters (including how they get new subscribers) here, for FREE:

<https://insights.bookbub.com/state-author-newsletters-data/>

Can't get started? "The First Line" has been offering opening sentences and publishing their best submissions from them for 25 years. Great inspiration, but be sure to review their guidelines, even if you don't plan to send them your results:

[www.thefirstline.com](http://www.thefirstline.com)

Or maybe you're in need of some general help. Available here: [writershelpingwriters.net](http://writershelpingwriters.net) (see especially the Tools page) and at their sister site: [onestopforwriters.com](http://onestopforwriters.com)

If you're thinking of adding a reading group guide to your self-published book but don't know quite how to handle it, this site might help: [readinggroupguides.com](http://readinggroupguides.com)

It's never too late! Chicory Blue Press is a feminist press publishing books and chapbooks by women over 70:

<http://www.chicorybluepress.com/index.html>

Nobody wants to think about what might happen if you're falsely accused of copyright infringement. Alesha Brown tackles this tough topic in the March 27 issue of *Booklife* here:

[https://www.digitalpwselect.com/pwselect/booklife\\_march\\_27\\_2023/](https://www.digitalpwselect.com/pwselect/booklife_march_27_2023/)

[BTW... this is a great FREE publication! Sign up to get it regularly.]

And on a related note... The Writer Beware Blog [r] has a great post on rights versus copyright:

<https://writerbeware.blog/2023/04/14/rights-vs-copyright-untangling-the-confusion/>

"The very nicest thing about being a writer is that you can afford to indulge yourself endlessly with oddness, and nobody can really do anything about it, as long as you keep writing and kind of using it up, as it were... All you have to do—and watch this carefully, please—is keep writing. As long as you write it away regularly, nothing can really hurt you."

—SHIRLEY JACKSON

## Online Publishers Databases

Thanks to Poets & Writers, here are a few places you might find your next paying market for your writing.

❑ Who Pays Writers? [[whopayswriters.com](http://whopayswriters.com)]

❑ Chill Subs [[chillsubs.com/browse/magazines](http://chillsubs.com/browse/magazines)]

❑ Poets & Writers Literary Magazines database [[pw.org/literary\\_magazines](http://pw.org/literary_magazines)]

❑ Community of Literary Magazines and Presses [[clmp.org/readers/directory-of-publishers](http://clmp.org/readers/directory-of-publishers)]

Good luck! Let us know if you use any of these and if they help! Know of others? Send in the info to share with fellow Penwheelers 😊

Summer Prompt:  
June 5 is National Donut  
Day. Write a poem,  
story, or memory about  
donuts.

*Not receiving the newsletter? Make sure the editor has your current e-mail address so you'll get it sent directly to you. Check your Spam or Junk folder to make sure your notices aren't landing there by mistake (these notices are sent out bulk....) OR get the current and PAST issues online at <https://ellenbooks.com/newsletter-archive/> Just click the link for the issue you want and it will automatically download for you into either your Download folder or wherever your downloaded files end up ☺ Problems? Contact Ellen at [ellenbehr@aol.com](mailto:ellenbehr@aol.com)*

# Enter the FAMOUS Penwheels “Win-Win” Contest!

## What is the Win-Win Contest?

You win if your article is chosen, our fellow Penwheelers win because they benefit from what you’ve shared in the newsletter. So it’s a win-win!

## How do you enter?

Simple! Just submit an article for the Fall 2023 or Winter 2023 issue. Word length: 500-750 words maximum. E-mail it as a Word document (if you can; if not specify what you can send) to Ellen: [ellenbehr@aol.com](mailto:ellenbehr@aol.com). Put “Win-Win Contest Entry” in the subject line of the e-mail. Deadline: August 15, 2023, for the Fall issue; November 15, 2023, for the Winter issue.

## What type of article should you submit?

You can send in something on the craft of writing (how-to do something) or a personal experience essay (especially something related to your writing and/or RV travels). Poetry (up to 25 lines) and short stories (up to 1000 words) are also welcome. If you’ve got other ideas, go with your gut and send it in!

## Who can submit?

If you’ve never contributed to the newsletter before, or if it’s been a long time, you’re especially encouraged. The time has never been better to give it a shot! All articles already published in the 2023 newsletters are automatically entered.

## How will winners be chosen?

Okay, I confess. Winners will be randomly picked. Every article, column, news item and other tidbit is always of value to someone, right?

**PLUS!** A random COLUMNIST will be chosen. Maybe a random reader, too, (if I can just figure out how to do that).

## When will winners be announced?

Winners will be individually notified by e-mail and announced in the Spring 2024 issue of the newsletter (wow! Thinking ahead, aren’t we?!?).

## What are the prizes?

The prizes are surprises (is that really a surprise to you?), but you can bet they’ll be writing- or RV-related in some way. But it’s not about the prize, anyway, right? It’s more about contributing to your favorite—no, MOST favorite—e-newsletter and supporting the work of your fellow Penwheelers.

***Don’t wait! Get started on your article today so it will be ready to submit!***

***Questions? Contact Ellen at [ellenbehr@aol.com](mailto:ellenbehr@aol.com)***

## ***YOUR VOICE MATTERS!***

No Letters to the Editor this month, but I’m always happy to hear – and share! – what you have to say, even if it hurts my feelings. Always welcome are your suggestions, ideas, and any needed corrections.

Just send me an e-mail at [ellenbehr@aol.com](mailto:ellenbehr@aol.com) with “PW Letter to the Editor” in the subject line. Thanks!

*Ellen*

