



# Penwheels

For Escapees Writers... Published or Not

Winter  
2023

## TRUTH AND FICTION

by Janetta Fudge Messmer

The idea for *An Unexpected Christmas Gift* (my latest novel) came to me because my hubby and I owned a bed and breakfast. When I remember how the story of our B&B journey began, it is actually quite humorous.

Some of you may have read my first novel, *Early Birds*. In it, I talked about Rose Wilford getting the cart before the horse. In this circumstance, we did it. We were in Montrose, Colorado, less than an hour, and we spied this unique home. Four hours later we bought it.

YOU DID WHAT???

The second I saw it, I shouted, "Look, there's a B&B, and it's for sale." We called the Realtor, saw the house, met the previous owner, and made a deal on it. The only problem – we purchased it before the sale of our auto repair business was final.



[Whoa! Will Janetta and hubby regret this rash decision? [Read more on page 14](#)]

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Thanksgiving is generally considered the time of year when we show gratitude to others, but around here we believe in thanking folks year-round. This issue we'd like to salute our seven hard-working, unpaid, regular columnists for their behind-the-scenes efforts. Each of us benefits from their dedication to sharing their knowledge and experience with the rest of us. I've been writing professionally for more than fifty years, and I learn something with every issue, from every contribution. Please join me in saying THANK YOU to Joanne, Jaimie, Deb, Marisa, Marguerita, Margo, and Donna! It's impossible to select "the best columnist," so the winner of a \$10 Amazon gift certificate or unique PW bracelet (winner's choice) was selected by random. Congratulations Marisa!!

And congratulations to Janetta Fudge Messmer for being the randomly-selected winner of the 2023 Win-Win Contest! We appreciate EVERY contributor to this newsletter—keep it up!

On a sad note, we learned Janice Lasko passed away. We'll miss her humor and insight. Jaimie offers a tribute on page 2.

Next year is a special year for Penwheels! According to Doris Hutchins, Myrna Courtney started the Penwheels Birds of a Feather Newsletter in May of 1994—so May of 2024 marks 30 YEARS for this publication. How cool is that?!? From what I can tell, Penwheels has been around longer than its newsletter, but I have little information about it.

I hope those of you who have been members through much of this rich history will comb your memories, documents, and any photos—then share them with us so we can properly celebrate our 30 Year Anniversary!

Happy Holidays!

*Ellen*



### In This Issue...

[Braggin' Rights](#)

[Jaimie's Tips](#)

[Gift Ideas](#)

[Little Free Libraries](#)

[Market Share](#)

[Member Profile](#)

[Fiction Tips](#)

[World of Publishing](#)

[Middle of Nowhere](#)

[Remembering Janice](#)

[New Book by Penwheeler](#)

[Penwheels CONNECTS!](#)

[Win-Win in 2024](#)

... and Much More!



## BRAGGIN' RIGHTS

**Contributed by  
Joanne Alexakis**



The Nov/Dec 2023 *Escapees* magazine has a contribution from our Penwheels BoF members, Gary & Margie Spangenberg - SKP#82922. This Dynamic Duo write about a fascinating Alaskan camping spot complete with photos! Page 17. Thanks, Gary!

## REMEMBERING JANICE: A TRIBUTE TO JANICE LASKO

**Contributed by Jaimie Bruzenak**

Janice Lasko, Penwheeler, passed away on October 20, 2023. Her husband, Gabby, who was 98, had passed away the month before. Janice had been a member of Penwheels for a couple of years and recently contributed "The Fine Art of Windsurfing" in the Summer 2023 issue and "HIS NAME WAS GILBERT" in the Fall 2023 issue. Her hilarious "Falling in the shower and I can't get up" article appeared in *Escapees* magazine in the Jan/Feb 2023 issue.

Janice and Gabby were full-time RVers who joined *Escapees* sometime in the '80s. They Workamped in some unusual positions including at ski resorts to get free ski passes and ran a bed and breakfast, among many others. At one ski resort, Janice gave the daily snow report on the local radio. Most of us who have been *Escapees* members for some years probably remember Janice best for being the editor of *Escapees* magazine. She wrote a column for each issue and took the magazine from a small, casual magazine to a glossy, professional product. She contributed 5 pieces to the anthology that the late Alice Zyetz and I co-authored, *RV Traveling Tales*, and contributed her Workamping stories to *Support Your RV Lifestyle!*

I remember line dancing with her in the winter of 1995, her passion at the time. We kept in touch and saw them occasionally after they settled down in Oregon and Arizona. The January issue of *Escapees* will have a tribute to her. Even though we were only in touch now and then, I will miss both of them. They were a special couple.

## JAIMIE'S TIPS

**Contributed by  
Jaimie Bruzenak**



Get paid for your short fiction pieces! See "6 Flash Fiction Markets That Pay Writers \$20-\$500" by Rajeshwari Kumari in *Writers Weekly* 8/19/23:

<https://writersweekly.com/marketing-secrets/6-flash-fiction-markets-that-pay-writers-20-500-by-rajeshwari-kumari>

Most of us are at an age where we have stories to tell about our lives. They may or may not include RVing. In the 8/12/23 issue of *Writers Weekly*, this article lists seven magazines that seek personal stories: <https://writersweekly.com/this-weeks-article/7-magazines-that-pay-writers-for-personal-stories-by-rajeshwari-kumari>

The 9/1/23 email from the *Escapees* RV Club included an invitation for members to submit to the *Escapees* magazine. Click the link to see the variety of ways you can see your name in print!

<https://escapees.com/education/escapees-magazine/submissions/>

Larry McMurtry was honored recently by a Literary Landmark plaque in Archer, Texas, following his remarkable career as bestselling novelist, Pulitzer Prize winner, author of the beloved LONESOME DOVE, Academy Award-winning screenwriter, public intellectual and passionate bookseller. At [https://www.ala.org/united/products\\_services/literarylandmarks/landmarksbystate/landmarksbystate](https://www.ala.org/united/products_services/literarylandmarks/landmarksbystate/landmarksbystate) you can find literary landmarks listed by state. They would be fun to stop by in your travels!

Have a chuckle reading "Writing From the Crypt...Almost: Hilarious Musings From a 70-Year-Old Writer!" by Terry Schutz in *Writers Weekly* 1-6-23: <https://writersweekly.com/this-weeks-article/writing-from-the-crypt-almost-hilarious-musings-from-a-70-year-old-writer-by-terry-schutz>





## GIFT IDEAS

### FOR WRITERS AND BOOK LOVERS

Wish you had a library but don't have the collection or space? How about a wallpaper pattern that makes it look as though you have floor-to-ceiling shelves of books?!? Take a look at this artist's work on Etsy:

<https://www.etsy.com/listing/1361478101/custom-size-library-wallpaper-book-shelf>

Isn't shopping online great? For someone who's always wanted an old typewriter (and has never owned one already), here's the appropriately vintage site for finding one:

[https://www.vintagetyperwritershoppe.com/Vintage\\_Typerwriters.html](https://www.vintagetyperwritershoppe.com/Vintage_Typerwriters.html)

What's even more old-school than a typewriter? A pen, of course. This creative craftswoman makes fun polymer pens, from unicorns to chameleons to giraffes and more:

[https://www.etsy.com/shop/handmademom?ref=12-about-shopname&section\\_id=7076158](https://www.etsy.com/shop/handmademom?ref=12-about-shopname&section_id=7076158)

And for someone who loves to keep a journal (or is looking for the best reason to start writing in one), a personalized cover might do the trick. Or perhaps you know a left-handed writer who'd love a spiral notebook that opens the opposite way most do? Here's one possibility for you:

<https://www.zazzle.com/journals+for+writers+notebooks>

What better way to personalize a journal (or e-reader or laptop or car or... whatever!) than stickers! Book-themed stickers, that is:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0BZDNRVB2>

RV-Themed Toys and Games make great presents! Here's one list of suggestions:

<https://www.rvlifemag.com/rv-themed-toys-for-christmas/>

NEED MORE INSPIRATION? [See page 8!](#)

## LITTLE FREE LIBRARIES

*Contributed by Jaimie Bruzenak*

Jaimie spotted these two LFLs in LaCanada Flintridge, California. How cute are they?!?



Can't help loving it when the people who put these up design and paint them to match their homes or barns or (in this case) the garage!



"Why is the alphabet in that order? Is it because of that song?"

— Stephen Wright

## MARKET SHARE: AI-READ AUDIOBOOKS

by *Marguerita McManus*



Amazon recently announced they are in beta for creating audiobooks read via artificial intelligence (AI). I've been following so many people who have jumped into the audiobook creation process in so many ways: hiring a professional narrator; narrating their own books using their voice and equipment; using Google Play to create an AI-narrated book are just a few. Uploading a narrated book to YouTube is another rocket some author-publishers have ridden to success.

I am not an audiobook buyer, but I have used listening to the book being read as a method of self-editing. I prefer to do as much editing as I can before sending my book to a professional. I know that I often repeat words when I write, and the programs I use to edit don't always catch that. I catch a lot of mistakes when I upload my ePub file to an electronic book reader (Kindle Reader) and read it myself, which is my second self-edit. (My first is using ProWritingAid.) Next, I listen to it being read aloud. Hearing words repeated within a short paragraph really makes them stand out to me. I often increase the speed to 1.5, which I find even more helpful.

I'm not a beta-tester for this new service by Amazon but I wish I were, and I'm looking forward to learning the terms of usage. As a recent convert from Windows to MacBook, I'm looking forward to Apple doing the same thing. Currently author-publishers have to go through a third party to have their audiobook available on Apple Books.

I did a search to learn how much the popularity of audiobooks is growing and was surprised to see that 1/6 of all books sold in 2021 were audiobooks. Over 53% of Americans listened to at least one audiobook in 2023, up from 45% in 2022 and 23% in 2021. I can see why Amazon bought Audible, the same way they bought CreateSpace, the company I first used to self-publish. And I'm sure there will be many author-publishers like me who will be eager to use it. Are you an audiobook listener or creator?

When researching AI-read books last year, I found several companies that offer surprisingly realistic-sounding voices. ElevenLabs is given the highest rating by users in the publishing groups I belong to, but Google Play isn't bad either, and it's free. There's even an app that lets you read your own book to create an AI voice. Why would you do that? Sound quality, background noise, and funny things called pops and hisses, for a start. Good recording equipment, space, and talent are necessary to create a live recording that's worth listening to.

If you're an author-publisher who wants to see how this all works, I suggest you try Google Play first. It's free and fairly easy to use, especially if you're already selling your books on their platform.

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)

*Can you lose on an audiobook if the process to create it is free? Your editor, who never seriously considered converting any of her books to audio, recently had an offer to convert a book for free. Was it worth it? [See page 7](#) to read what happened.*





## MEMBER PROFILE: JIM HENDRICKSON

by *Marisa Wolf*

In his 20's, Jim Hendrickson was nearly broke and moved into a travel trailer. By 45, he retired. As you might imagine, there were plenty of adventures along the way—and beyond!

Over the years, he's lived in five RVs—that first used travel trailer, then a tiny travel trailer, a small motorhome, a fifth wheel, and now back to a small travel trailer—and a few brick and mortar houses. Throughout this time, his two passions remained constant: travel and cycling (note his usual internet handle, “cyclopath”).

Jim's discipline, focus, and love of travel have served him well in both writing specifically and life in general. Over the last sixty-plus years, he's written dozens upon dozens of foreign language programs—both Spanish and English as Second Language—from textbooks through audio materials. These instructions, guides, and manuals were profitable over time, leading to his early retirement.

For scholarship, he also published articles in language acquisition journals, and helpful articles in travel magazines and newspapers.

For fun and to share more of the world with people, he's written and published twenty adventure travel ebooks. Not everyone has the health, time, or budget to travel widely, but as a “very frugal world traveler” Jim's had the experiences and skill to give these vicarious experiences to folks, and continues to write nonfiction ebooks to this day.

His ongoing productivity springs in part from that discipline mentioned above. He takes notes (zillions of them!), so when it's time to sit down and write, his thoughts are already organized and ready to convert into brilliance. First he groups them into categories, setting out the overall narrative he wants. After the rough draft comes editing—which can involve rewriting the book up to fifty times (and sometimes, even more), until the whole comes together like a fully complete jigsaw puzzle.

This process is demanding, but even twenty books later remains fun and exciting, given Jim's deep love for travel. He quotes Mark Twain in naming travel one of his two great passions: “Travel is the enemy of prejudice, bigotry and narrowmindedness.” And he should be quoted in turn, for his reflection on Twain's thoughts, “I feel that travel makes one more open-minded, no matter if one agrees or disagrees with other people's opinions. But it's important to listen quietly with an understanding attitude.”

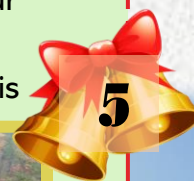
That approach has clearly served Jim well in his world travels. While he doesn't have a favorite camping location, he's enjoyed his “in tents” times all around the globe, many of which we can experience through his compellingly written books.

Now 80 years old, Jim knows well that life comes with its fair share of disappointments, tragedies, and hardships. His attitude and his words keep focused on moving forward: “Believe in yourself! Believe that you have the ability to overcome your troubles and problems. Never stop believing that you can achieve your dreams. Often it takes time...sometimes plenty of time. My best advice: Do you what YOU feel is right. Then give it all ya got! Don't worry about what others think or say. You've done your BEST!”

Jim has clearly lived up to this over the years, and may we all have the opportunity to follow his example!



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).



## FICTION TIPS: STUCK IN THE MIDDLE WITH YOU

by **Debra S. Sanders**



Crafting the middle section of a story often presents the greatest challenge for authors. This segment marks the juncture where the initial excitement of the plot has worn off while the climactic moments still lie ahead. Some writers, in this phase, tend to succumb to the temptation of filling pages with extensive background details and verbose descriptions, inadvertently prioritizing "word count" over content. If readers lose interest during this part of the story, it could lead to them abandoning the book before reaching its conclusion.

Here are a few suggestions to prevent those bad writing habits from sabotaging your novel.

The first tip is to ensure the middle of your story is as compelling as the beginning and the end. This is where an author's writing skill comes into play. The middle should not be a mere bridge between the start and the climax. Instead, it should be a captivating journey that keeps the reader hooked.

One effective strategy is to introduce new elements or subplots in the middle of the story. This could be a new character, a surprising twist, or a deepening of the main character's internal conflict. These elements can add layers to the story, making it more complex and intriguing. They can also provide opportunities for character development.

Another strategy is to maintain a steady pace. The middle of the story is not the place for lengthy descriptions or slow-moving scenes. Instead, the author should keep the action moving with each scene propelling the story forward. This doesn't mean that every paragraph must be action-packed. The story can evolve by revealing new information, developing characters, or building tension.

The author's writing style can also play a significant role in keeping readers engaged. A clear panoptic writing style can make even the most mundane scenes interesting. The author should strive to make every sentence count, using vivid descriptions and strong verbs to bring the story to life.

As an author, your role is to guide the reader through the story, ensuring they remain engaged and invested in the narrative. This is particularly crucial in the middle of the story, where reader interest can wane.

Create strong emotional connections between the reader and the characters. The reader should care about what happens to the characters, and this emotional investment can keep them engaged even when the plot slows down.

Another technique is to use cliffhangers or suspenseful moments to keep the reader turning the pages. This doesn't mean you have to end every chapter with a dramatic cliffhanger. Instead, you can create smaller moments of suspense within the chapters, leaving the reader eager to find out what happens next.

With careful planning, compelling writing, and a focus on character development and suspense, you can ensure that your readers stay hooked from the first page to the last.

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>





## WORLD OF PUBLISHING

by *Margo Armstrong*



Beat inflation by picking up cash or goodies entering writing contests! Check out [Winning Writers](#), “the best resources for poets and writers.” They dole out advice for writers; suggest books, literary forums, magazines and literary journals.



The big reason to take a look here is their list *Markets and Contests for Writers*. They also have Resources and Contests for *Students and Educators*. Want to break into the greeting card market, write humor and satire, or make it big in the Catholic writers’ market? There is something here for every artist with words.

Check out *Cathy’s Comps and Calls*, the writing resource that specializes in free-to-enter contests that can be entered online. Her book, “How to Win Writing Competitions (and Make Money)” sounds like a winner to me.

There is also a *Scam Busting* category among the *Resources* that should be scanned first before entering any competition. Learn details about the writing contest market that can help you win big or avoid it all together.

Make sure you peruse the “Warning Signs of a Bad Literary Contest” in the *Contests and Services to Avoid* section.

No discussion about writing contests is complete without mentioning [Writer Beware](#), the essential blog by Victoria Strauss. She not only covers the latest publishing, marketing, and fake literary agency scams but comments on the rise of [impersonation rip-offs](#). So, get out there and win some money, but be cautious.

Margo Armstrong is the author and publisher of over 20 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). Contact Margo at [MovingOnWithMargo@outlook.com](mailto:MovingOnWithMargo@outlook.com)

## WAS MY FREE AUDIOBOOK PRODUCTION WORTH IT?

by *Ellen Behrens*

Although most of my books are still available through Lulu Press, I switched *Pea Body* to Draft2Digital a few years ago. Last spring I was contacted by them to see if I wanted to participate in a beta trial; they’d convert my novel into an Apple audiobook for *free*.

Can’t go wrong for free, right? They sent me a link to voice samples and I picked a female I thought would work for the narration. Then I forgot about this little experiment until I got another e-mail with a link to the finished audiobook. Here’s the link: <https://books.apple.com/us/audiobook/id1704721270>

If you’ve never heard your own book read by a stranger, you’re in for an experience! I’m now am aware of how much the voice can affect the tone of the book overall. I think the narrator of *Pea Body* sounds a bit more romantic than suspenseful. What do you think?

Curious, I clicked the Top Audiobooks link and turned on the sample of the bestselling fiction audiobook (“[Lessons in Chemistry](#)” by [Bonnie Garmus](#)). Lo and behold, I could have sworn it was the same narrator! Now, after reading Marguerita’s column (see page XX), I’m wondering if my book’s narrator is even human!

What do you think makes the difference between a good audiobook and a bad one? Why? Tell us about your writing and reading experiences with audio books!



## GIFT IDEAS

### FOR WRITERS AND BOOK LOVERS

Love sipping tea while you read? How about [Bag Ladies' Novel Teas](#)? Each of the 25 tea bags has a literary quote. Plus the company and product names are just very cool.

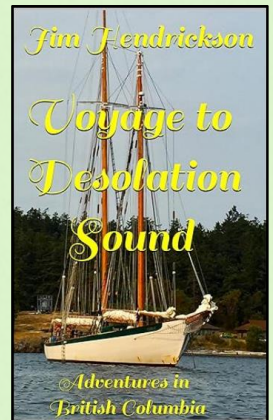
And... you'll need some nice coasters for sipping that Novel Tea. How about some old library book due date cards? Remember those? I loved watching the librarian stamp those cards.... 4 for about \$10 on [Amazon](#).

If none of these ideas appeal to you, maybe something on this [Gifts for Book Lovers](#) list from the Independent Book Review site will.

And I just discovered this wonderful site: [Out of Print](#) has an amazing selection of clothing, mugs, gift bags, journals, bookmarks.... get lost in this site and try not to spend too much money 😊

## PENWHEELS MEMBER PUBLISHES NEW TRAVEL BOOK

Jim Hendrickson's "Voyage to Desolation Sound: Adventures in British Columbia" captures his 11-day round-trip cruise on a 100-year old schooner. He includes a brief history of the region as well as describing his own adventure aboard the ship.



Congratulations, Jim! Penwheelers, you can [get your copy from Amazon here](#).





# MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

by Guest Contributor Charlie Parker

*Writer's Note: While wintering at Jojoba Hills SKP resort near Temecula, California, I participated in a weekly creative writing group. Sessions consisted of 3-5 ten-minute writing assignments, although some were only given five minutes. Most of the stories written were very short because of the time, but were a lot of fun. Some just stop without an ending because the timer went off. Many could be expanded. At the end of each writing assignment we went around the table reading our stories and then discussing them. It was amazing the amount of talent that was shown and developed through the course. We often laughed until we had tears in our eyes. Prompts for the assignments varied; this one came from the prompt: "Middle of nowhere."*

It has to be a given. If anything is going to go wrong. If anything is going to happen. If anything is going to scare the shit out of you—you will be in the middle of nowhere.

Where exactly is the middle of nowhere? It is just far enough from anything else that no one can hear you scream. It is just out of cell phone range. It is just out of the circle for free pizza delivery.

Each of us has found ourselves in the middle of nowhere on many occasions. The time I ran out of gas in the car. It was 8 miles to the closest fuel source—but off the main road so no one would stop and give me a ride—in either direction. That was the middle of nowhere. I had to walk to and from the middle of nowhere.

When the bear attacked my friend's sleeping bag to get after the chocolate bar—it was 45 miles from Yosemite Valley—that is the middle of nowhere.

When the forestay on my Hobie Cat broke—I was de-masted 4 miles off shore—that was the middle of nowhere.

When the motorhome broke down and we sat at the side of the road in Washington for 10 ½ hours and no cop or anyone else stopped—it seemed like the middle of nowhere. At least the cell phone worked on that occasion. We called for help. We were only 6 miles from a good sized town. But, we needed the assistance of a "big-rig-tow-truck". The response was, "It'll be a while before we get there are in the middle of nowhere".

When I try to work on my book it frequently seems my mind is not on the subject of which I am writing. It is probably in the middle of nowhere.

Right now my mind is in the middle of nowhere because I cannot come up with a concrete story to write about the middle of nowhere.

It could start: She was in the middle of nowhere in the middle of the forest when she heard the scream. She could not tell where it came from. It might as well be the middle of nowhere.

## CONGRATS MARISA!

We're lucky to have fantastic columnists who devote time to this newsletter they could be giving to their own writing. Each is a winner, so only by random drawing could we pick someone to receive the prize (a unique Penwheels bracelet or \$10 Amazon gift card—her choice).

If a particular column has helped you in some way, I hope you'll express gratitude to that columnist. Please consider writing them a note of thanks or a Letter to the Editor ☺

## GRAMMAR QUIZ

A weather forecaster was heard saying, "We'll be talking about a little raise in the temperatures."

Was this grammatically correct?

[\[See page 10 for the answer!\]](#)

## WINTER PROMPTS

*These are actual items taken from law enforcement reports as recorded in a local newspaper in Bonner County, Idaho. Pick one (or choose them all!) and write a story, essay, or poem using it/them. Set your imagination free ☺*

Report of a traffic hazard on Highway 41 in Blanchard at 6:28 a.m.

Deputies assisted Sandpoint Police in the Bridge Street area at 3:12 p.m.

Report of a family offense in Spirit Lake on Cabin Ridge Road at 3:07 a.m.

Report of a possible battery on Fifth Avenue at 8:09 p.m.

Report of a possible drunken driver in the area of Fifth and Main Street at 12:08 a.m.

Officers responded to a report of a reckless driver in the area of Lakeshore Drive and Plaster Road in Sagle at 5:21 p.m.

Report of an intoxicated person in the Main Street area at 3:24 p.m.

## GRAMMAR QUIZ ANSWER (SORT OF)

"We'll be talking about a little raise in the temperatures" **is not** grammatically correct.

"We'll be talking about a little rise in the temperatures" **is** correct.

WHY?

*[See page 12 for the final answer!]*

## LINKS

The Literacy Project Foundation learned that three out of five people in prison can't read and statistics for juvenile offenders are no better, 85% of whom have trouble reading. The link between illiteracy and crime has long been established. We can all do something about that, and one group makes it possible for us to help. Freedom Reads, founded by former inmate, poet, attorney and MacArthur Fellow (no small trick getting that, to be sure!), fashions tiny, beautiful libraries for placement in prisons. Take a look: [freedomreads.org](https://freedomreads.org)

Looking for book reviewers? They're everywhere. Here's one place to start:

<https://independentbookreview.com/2023/08/08/find-book-reviewers/>

Newest scam and (no surprise!) AI is involved: <https://janefriedman.com/i-would-rather-see-my-books-pirated/>

Have I posted this one before? If so, it's worth doing it again because we can't have too prompts. These are courtesy Poets & Writers magazine: <https://www.pw.org/writing-prompts-exercises>

Lauryn Chamberlain thought the four main characters in her novel "Who We Are Now" meant juggling four points of view. "[T]hen I realized: Because all four characters are—or had been, at least—close friends, I wasn't simply handling four different views of the world. I was handling somewhere between six and twelve different relationships." How did she handle this? If you're considering more than one point of view character you should read this:

<https://lithub.com/on-the-exponential-difficulty-of-juggling-many-narrative-voices/>



Party Time! If you're planning to be in Quartzsite this January and would like to represent Penwheels at the Escapees' Party on Plomosa, here's what you need to know: will be January 24, 2024. The event will be on January 24, 2024, from 1:00pm and until 5:00pm Mountain Time. A table is available for promoting Penwheels—a great opportunity to promote your own work, too! Interested? Please let Joanne know if you'd like to do this ASAP ([joalexakis@earthlink.net](mailto:joalexakis@earthlink.net)).

Thank you—and have fun!!!



## AMERICAN ROAD PROFILE

*American Road* magazine consists of about 112 glossy, full-color pages. It's published quarterly. Most ads (all but about five of them) were from visitors' bureaus around the country promoting their cities, counties, and states.

Feature articles and columns in the issue I sampled related to Christmas and included cities like North Pole and stores like Bonner's in Frankenmuth, Michigan. Any traveler looking for a holiday experience any time of the year would read every page of this issue.

It appears to be tricky for a freelancer to get an acceptance—maybe they've been burned by writers who promised to deliver but couldn't. In any case, the bylines were for staff members and several "contributors" listed on the masthead who might be freelancers or stringers who write regularly for the magazine (there's no way to know from one issue).

From their website FAQ page under "How can I get a copy of your Writers' Guide?"

*Writers must submit a query along with resume, published clips, and sample images to demonstrate how the proposed article might be illustrated. Please be advised that AMERICAN ROAD® is put together by theme. We strongly recommend that individuals familiarize themselves with AMERICAN ROAD's style prior to submitting a query.*

*In general, authors will undergo a trial period before being assigned any articles exceeding five hundred words in length.*

*Our editorial lead time for AMERICAN ROAD® is nine to twelve months.*

I couldn't find out how much they currently pay but did find a description from a few years ago which reported 13-cents per word (about \$65 for a 500-word article, for example). Payment could be higher or lower for writers trying to break into this market.

Before querying, read at least one issue; do an analysis of the average length the articles run, especially those written by the "contributors." And pay attention to specific information included in those articles: places to stay and eat, attractions, and other details could make or break a query. Do you have publication-level photographs of your own or from a visitors' bureau (with permission, remember) to offer as well?

This will give you a rough idea of how to approach this publication with a destination piece you've written. Queries should be directed to the editor, [Thomas Arthur Repp](#). For more information: [facebook/americanroad](#) and [twitter/americanroad](#)

Good luck!

## HOW MUCH ARE AUTHORS EARNING?

I was going to summarize a few articles I read on this topic, but decided you might find the source more interesting. And it's a good one, because you can check it any time you like, gather the info and data you're most curious about, and get swallowed up in it.

WordsRated is an international research data and analytics group. They conduct detailed research projects on reading, books, authors, and the publishing industry (according to their website).

Read their summaries of [fiction book sales for 2021](#), and [self-published books and author sales for 2021](#) (by the time you read this, stats might be available for 2023). Read on!

### NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Ellen Behrens

[penwheels@yahoo.com](mailto:penwheels@yahoo.com)

### MEMBERSHIP

Joanne Alexakis

[joalexakis@earthlink.net](mailto:joalexakis@earthlink.net)

### PROFILER

Marisa Wolf

[marisa.wolf@gmail.com](mailto:marisa.wolf@gmail.com)

### HISTORICAL RECORDS

Jaimie Bruzenak

[calamityjaimie@gmail.com](mailto:calamityjaimie@gmail.com)

All content © individual authors

## PENWHEELS CONNECTS!

*Think of this as FREE AD SPACE! Post your requests for help, discovered resources you think fellow members would appreciate hearing about, even challenges if you want to extend them beyond the Facebook group (not all Penwheelers are on Facebook, remember). Keep your items brief and send them to Ellen at [penwheels@yahoo.com](mailto:penwheels@yahoo.com) with **Penwheels CONNECTS!** in the subject line. Here's a real-life example to get you started!*

\*\*\*\*\*

I'm working on a new book and would love to hear from past and present full-time RVers about their idea of "home." Not just "home is where we park it," but how did/do you answer the question, "Where's home?" Send your responses to Ellen at [ellenbehr@aol.com](mailto:ellenbehr@aol.com) with the subject line "RVers at Home" – THANK YOU!

\*\*\*\*\*

*See how easy that is? Don't wait –  
CONNECT!*

## GRAMMAR QUIZ ANSWER (FINALLY!)

"We'll be talking about a little raise in the temperatures" **is not** grammatically correct.

"We'll be talking about a little rise in the temperatures" **is** correct.

WHY?

Even though "raise" and "rise" can both be used as nouns and verbs, "rise" refers to an increase in something—in this case, the temperatures. A "raise" can refer to an increase, too, but usually in salary, not temperatures. (Don't you love English?!?)

## RV MAGAZINE PROFILE

Published monthly by GS Media & Events (a division of Good Sam Enterprises, LLC), "RV Magazine" is about 60 glossy pages of technical information, practical hints, and travel suggestions, spattered with what might be advertisements for RV brands, gear, and accessories disguised as articles (hard to say; I'm ever suspicious of Marcus Lemonis, Publisher, especially when he writes things like, "As RVers, we..." Is he really an RVer?).

The issue I perused (April 2023) focused on making the most of storage space, and featured articles on new RV models with larger storage capacity, creating a "storage map" of your RV to keep track of where you've put things, and other articles along these lines.

Bylines for the articles were for staff members and writers listed as contributors in the masthead; whether freelancers are credited this way or all writers are regular contributors is impossible to tell from one issue. **Their guidelines are clear and easily accessible.** Note that they require photos with articles (details in the guidelines).

If you've got an idea for this publication, I'd recommend formulating a full article around it, rather than submitting it as a "QuickTip," as those are immediately claimed by the publication; they can print those or use them in any way they wish without compensating (or crediting you) in any way, so avoid that unless your idea is pretty much a throw-away notion you don't care much about.

The pay for articles is decent, and they offer a kill fee, which isn't always done ("kill fee" means if they say they'll take an article then for some reason decide not to use it, you get part of the regular fee).

As always, make sure you review a few copies of the publication before querying them, and pay close attention to their submission guidelines. They don't spend the time writing these and posting them only for writers to assume they don't mean anything (and ignoring them could cost you the assignment, so... just DON'T).

Most of the articles online are behind the subscription firewall, but you can see a few examples on their Web site: [www.rv.com](http://www.rv.com)

Good luck!



## YOUR MISSION FOR 2024

Bobbie Ann Mason (b. 1940 in Kentucky) is a novelist (the Bruce Willis movie *In Country* is based on her novel of the same title) and short story writer (notably *Shiloh and Other Stories*). In an interview with Bonnie Lyons and Bill Oliver (excerpted in *The Art of the Short Story*, edited by Dana Gioia and RS Gwynn), she says the following, when asked about her style:

*I try to approximate language that's very blunt and Anglo-Saxon. Instead of saying "a decorative vase of assorted blooms from the garden," I might say "a jug of flowers." "A jug of big red flowers." A lot of it is not just the meaning but the sound of the words and the rhythm of the words and the way they come out of a way of talking. It's also a certain attitude toward the world. Imagine a person who would say "jug" instead of "vase." Style comes out of a way of hearing people talk.*

Notice that she says "a way of hearing people talk," not just "out of how people talk." It's not just recognizing that different regions have different dialects or people have unique ways of expressing themselves—she's certainly acknowledging that. But she's also commenting on the need to listen for them. As a writer, you need to have "a way of hearing people talk." All of us could no doubt improve the way we hear other people. Here's your mission, should you choose to accept it:

The next time you're in a conversation with someone you don't know well, pay attention to their speech. Do they use complete sentences? Correct or incorrect grammar? Figures of speech? Did any phrases or words stand out for you in how they expressed themselves? What were they? Why did they capture your ear?

Do this with others—though don't be rude; keep up your side of the conversation! Then make notes on what you heard. Can you use the character behind this manner of speech in a story? Poem?

If you're working on a memoir or your autobiography, try to recall a conversation you had that fits into your recollections. Do you remember how people you knew talked? Were they straight-shooters or did they pussy-foot around things? Did they give an outright compliment or did you have to read gestures and expressions to understand they were pleased with you?

In this way, you'll develop a style: you'll find your own language for showing us who your characters are, and by doing that, you'll tell readers something about you, too.



***Give in to the temptation  
to share!***

**Deadlines are always:**

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

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

## FACT AND FICTION

by **Janetta Fudge Messmer**

(Continued from the first page)

Thankfully, forty-five days later, we signed the papers on both places. Friends and family helped us pack up and move to the western slope. We were quite the caravan going down I-70. Instead of the Clampetts, we were the Messmers.



In August of 1999, the Rusty Moose Bed & Breakfast opened its doors. We'd never owned a B&B, but with our background in customer service, we made it work. Hubby cooked (thank the Good Lord), and I served breakfast to our customers.

Ray teased me that I could retell the same story when new guests arrived every few days, and I did. But what we thought was the coolest part of owning a B&B was meeting the people who had made reservations.

One evening we were sitting on the porch with two couples—one from England, the other from Alabama. Ray and I were totally baffled by the conversation. Our nodding seemed to satisfy them. The other four appeared to understand each other perfectly.

Another time, a family came down for breakfast. Everyone seemed to enjoy their meal, and the mini muffins we'd added to the menu were a big hit. I didn't know how much until I overheard one sister tell the other, "I ate fourteen of those mini muffins. Yes, I did."

After they went upstairs, I told Ray the story and said, "We'll be making more mini muffins for tomorrow." The next day arrived, and the same young lady bragged at the end of it, "Today I ate twenty-one." We still laugh about that one when we make little muffins.

One more story. We also housed overflow guests when the hotels sold out. One evening a man and his wife came in. They'd never stayed at a B&B before, and the man asked me, "You just let people stay here that you don't know?" I smiled, "Yes, but I keep a butcher knife under my pillow in case someone gets out of hand."

The look on that man's face was priceless. I quickly added, "No, I don't have a knife hidden anywhere. I trust that the Lord will protect us." On their way out the next morning, the man said, "Thank you. Our stay has been wonderful. You sold us on B&Bs." You're very welcome, sir!!!

[Janetta's adventures as a B&B owner *continue on the next page*]



## FACT AND FICTION

by **Janetta Fudge Messmer**

(Continued from the previous page)

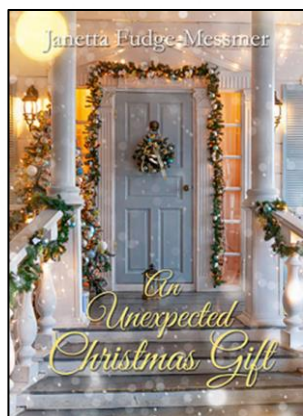
Oh my goodness, I have to tell you another story. A couple stayed with us, and two months later, we received Rusty in the mail (see photo). The gentleman said, "This is what you look like after you've served all of your bed and breakfast guests." And he wasn't kidding. We were tuckered out. [FYI: We have Rusty in our RV, and it reminds of us of our wonderful guests.]



In the almost three years of owning the Rusty Moose Bed and Breakfast, we welcomed visitors from all over the United States and the world. What an absolute joy. And, oh, we loved everyone who stayed with us.

However, because of 9/11, we had to close down and get real jobs. We rented the property to a girl's home for a few years, and then they bought it. It's funny, since we've retired, we've talked about opening up another one. Maybe one of these days, when we're done RVing. For now, I'll write a novel about one.

Here is the cover and back cover copy of *An Unexpected Christmas Gift*. Enjoy!



Breanna Snow owns the Snowed Inn B&B outside of Boulder, Colorado. And the city manager, Matthew Jacobson, is irritating the socks off of her. The Go-By-The-Book-Kind-Of-Guy wants to shut her bed and breakfast down. And Bree has no clue why.

But she doesn't have time for Mr. Jacobson's nonsense. She's getting married. However, a tiny hiccup occurs while she's trying on her wedding dress. It literally turns her world upside down. And to her dismay, the city manager is right in the middle of it.

Will the mortal enemies find a way to work things out before her B&B closes? Or will they die trying to find the truth and Breanna's "happily ever after?"

Penwheels, thank you for helping authors get the word out. *An Unexpected Christmas Gift* is available for \$1.99 on Amazon. Hope everyone have a Happy Holiday Season!!!

"Turning Life into Comedy" is Janetta Fudge Messmer's tagline. She writes Christian Comedy (with a touch of Romance). For Janetta, writing and traveling go hand in hand since she, her hubby, and their pooch are full-time RVers. Most days include sightseeing... but first Janetta has to sit down and write a few words.



Sorry... No Letters to the Editor this month.  
(A mystery, given our members are writers....)  
Give in to the temptation: [penwheels@yahoo.com](mailto:penwheels@yahoo.com)



## 2024 WIN-WIN CONTEST!

### ***Special 2024 anniversary articles wanted!***

#### **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 something for a 2024 issue. 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. [See page 13 for deadlines and publishing dates](#) for each issue.

#### **What should you submit?**

For 2024 we're especially interested in reprinting anything you might have published in the newsletter before 2005. And, as usual, you can send in articles on the craft of writing (how-to do something) or a personal experience essay (especially something related to your writing and/or RV travels). Word length: 500-750 words maximum. 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!

#### **How will winners be chosen?**

Winners will be randomly picked because every article, column, news item and other tidbit is always of value.

#### **When will winners be announced?**

Winners will be individually notified by e-mail and announced in the Winter 2024 issue of the newsletter.

#### **What are the prizes?**

In the past winners have received \$5 or \$10 Amazon gift certificates. 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)***

## MISSING NEWSLETTERS, NOTIFICATIONS, OR ANNOUNCEMENTS?

All members in our database receive e-mail messages when a newsletter is published. Those messages include a link for downloading the newsletter (<https://ellenbooks.com/newsletter-archive/>) and have a copy of the newsletter attached.

If you're not receiving these e-mails, please send your name and SKP# to Joanne Alexakis ([joalexakis@earthlink.net](mailto:joalexakis@earthlink.net)) so we can add you to the e-mail list or update our membership listing for you. It's possible we have an old e-mail address on file for you.

If you're no longer an SKP member but would like to receive announcements and copies of the newsletter, please notify Ellen the editor ([ellenbehr@aol.com](mailto:ellenbehr@aol.com)) so she can add you to the e-mail distribution list.

We don't want you to miss a single thing!

Hope you enjoyed  
this issue!

