



*Celebrating 30 Years*

Spring  
2024

# PENWHEELS

For Escapees Writers... Published or Not

## In the Beginning... It Was Time

by Lynne Benjamin

A big grin came across Fred's face when I told him "I'm not having fun anymore. Maybe it's time." Time meant giving up my work; time meant doing something else. He had been after me for years. For Fred, it meant going on the road. For me, it meant escaping a very disturbing and unhappy work situation. Three big clients cancelled or postponed projects—projects I was depending on to take us through the year. I had always worked and suddenly I was saying I was ready to give up a thriving consulting practice that had taken years to build.

### *Now What?*

If it were up to Fred, we would jump in the fifth wheel and go! I was excited at the prospect of traveling, but I wasn't sure I could just get up and go . . .

"I can't do that! We have the house and everything that's in it; we can't just take off. We haven't got enough money—how are we going to live?!"

"Easy enough," he says. "We'll just get rid of everything and sell the house. That should do it."

*{Will they do it? [See page 15](#)}*

## *Thank You, Long-Time Members!*

The history of the Penwheels Escapees Birds of a Feather group has as much drama as a good novel: a great start followed by some obstacles that make achieving the goal questionable. While a good story has a great ending, we hope this story just goes on and on and on...

This group and its newsletter are shining examples of what happens when people who share a common interest take a little time to contribute something that might inspire or help someone else. Without all of our members—past and present—this story would have ended long ago. THANK YOU!

Throughout 2024 we hope to capture bits and pieces of our long and *storied* (hee he! Get it?) past. If you have a particular Penwheels memory, please, *please* share it so those of us who are newer to the group will learn even more about our wonderful history—and see page XX to find out what you might win!

It's easy and FREE to submit ;-) Just send your submissions to [penwheels@yahoo.com](mailto:penwheels@yahoo.com), okay? Okay!



Bouquets of Spring to You!

*Ellen*

### *In this issue...*

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... and more!!

## Little Free Libraries



Jaimie Bruzenak spotted this cubbyhole of books while traveling in Australia. She writes this is “the equivalent of a little free library on the Indian Pacific train running between Sydney & Perth, Australia.”

## Braggin' Rights

by Joanne Alexakis

In the Jan/Feb 2024 *Escapees* magazine, Lucinda Belden SKP#159950 describes the various Margaritas (yes, Margaritas!) she has come across on her RVing travels (page 21). Pickly pear margarita, anyone?

*Escapees* magazine editor, Tammy Johnson, writes a memorial to PWR Janice Lasko and her husband, Gabby Lasko SKP #14104, on page 4. Their 'Final Journeys Farewell' is on page 87. (You can see our own tribute to Janice in the Winter 2023 issue, page 2.)

## Did you know...?

*Escapees* founders Joe and Kay Peterson belonged to the Penwheels BoF, and they each contributed articles to the newsletter!

Follow in their steps—  
send in an article of your own today!

## Jaimie's Tips

by Jaimie Bruzenak

How an author sold thousands of copies of his self-published books! See *Writers Weekly* November 23/23. <https://writersweekly.com/marketing-secrets/how-gary-sturgis-became-a-best-selling-booklocker-author>

You may be doing this instinctively, but take a look at your writing in these terms. Room for improvement? See *Writer's Weekly* 12/15/23 "Does Your Writing Tone Match Your Actual Message?" by Michael W. Michelsen, Jr. <https://writersweekly.com/this-weeks-article/the-elements-of-tone-by-michael-w-michelsen-jr>

These words may not be so useful in your writing, but they are fun to read. Perhaps you can slip them into a conversation with a writer friend! <https://today.wayne.edu/news/2024/01/08/wayne-state-word-warriors-release-2024-list-61301>

Before you open it, Chris Williams, head of the Word Warriors program, said, “This year’s list is particularly evocative. I love to picture myself inhaling the petrichor after a summer thunderplump or listening to someone twankle away on a guitar. It’s really a great selection this year.”  
See if you can guess their meaning before clicking on the link!



## Going to the Escapade in Wyoming?

If you'll be going to the Escapade in WY in June, would you be willing to man a Penwheels BoF table? If so, see Wendy's email below. You can contact her at the email below. Be sure to let Ellen know (or post on Facebook) if you are interested.

From: Chapter Directors  
<chapterdirectors@escapees.com>

Sent: Thursday, January 11, 2024 at 12:52:38 PM MST

Subject: Escapade 2024

Hello Everyone,

The year has gone by fast and the new year is coming. Escapade this year is in Rock Springs, Wyoming. The dates are June 16th through June 21st, 2024. The ROW will be in the Hospitality building like we did in Tucson this last year. I love this idea because it gives us more traffic. I am going to change the hours to 9:00 am to 2:00 pm so everyone has a turn to get out and see some of the seminars or participate in other activities. Also we will be open on community day.

For all of the representatives I will be giving one raffle ticket per couple for raffle prizes. I will also be doing Best BoF Table, Best Co-Op Table and Best Chapter Table. The members that walk through are the judges. I did this in Tucson and it made it fun.

If you would like to have a table at Escapade please email me and RSVP. I need to get a table count and list together for myself as well as for the Escapade Directors.

I will also be having a time set up in one of the rooms where we all can get together and do some follow ups, information, etc. Everyone is invited! Co-Ops, BoFs, and Chapters. This is not just for the ROW representatives.

If you have any concerns or input please email me and we can talk about it.

Thank You,

Wendy Stanwood  
Chapter/BoF Director



## Getting Accepted by Escapees Magazine

We celebrated Gary Spangenberg's publication in *Escapees* magazine in our previous issue. In a follow-up note, he said he made the submission "on a lark," and went on to add:

*Surprisingly, there was no interaction with anyone, and the article was published verbatim. The illustrations were modified in placement only to fit a single page article. A legalistic request for prior publishing was received, but it was of no major consequence. Before the magazine was published, I received an unexpected check for fifty dollars. Overall it was a surprising pleasant experience.*

Congrats again to Gary!

*{By the way, Marisa did a fantastic profile of Gary in the Spring 2022 issue. You can find it on the newsletter archive page on the Web if you'd like to read it.}*



BLOOM  
WHERE  
YOU ARE  
PLANTED

"I have always imagined that Paradise  
will be a kind of library."

—Jorge Luis Borges

# The Resurgence of Penwheels

by Betty Prange

*{Reprinted by permission from the author, with edits, from the June 2013 issue}*

The seed for reviving Penwheels occurred in November of 1994 during a small gathering in Pena Blanca Canyon in southern Arizona. Alice Zyetz offered to lead a writing session based on Natalie Goldberg's **"WRITING DOWN THE BONES."** Four of us joined her, including current Penwheel members Jaimie Hall-Bruzenak and me. The results amazed us and some of us met again during that winter, adding several new people.

We agreed we should get together at the Spring 1994 Escapade and do more writing exercises. This time the original seed was nurtured by a session presented by Myrna Courtney on writing for magazines.

Frankly, while she was enthusiastic in encouraging us all to write, she was not encouraging about a BOF. She had been a member of a previous group, called "Penwheels," which had folded for lack of interest. But she did agree to join us for one of the writing sessions and to talk more about getting published.

So, a couple of us put a notice up on the bulletin board for "wanna be" BOF's, and we were assigned a time and spot to meet. We found ourselves in the bleachers between a couple of large, enthusiastic and definitely unquiet groups. Writing with all the talking and laughing around us wasn't easy, but we persevered. We did a writing exercise, but mostly we talked about supporting each other in our efforts. Myrna told us the history of the previous Penwheels group and how it had become a one person effort to write, print and mail out the small newsletter. We liked the name, and we wanted to revive the BOF.

Based on the previous history of the group, Myrna wasn't sure it would fly, but with the same nurturing attitude she showed in her earlier presentation, she offered to edit the newsletter. I clearly remember her telling us, "I will be the editor. I will lay it out, I will type it up BUT I **WILL NOT** write the copy." It was clear that this had to be a group effort. If she received enough copy, she would put out a newsletter; if she didn't, there would be no newsletter.

We contacted the former editor, one-person producer to see how she felt about us taking over the name and operation. She gave us her blessings and we gave her a life-time free membership. We all agreed to write articles and to help make this BOF a going concern. I remember Verna Baker saying that she was a skilled procrastinator but promised to write something. In one of our early newsletters, perhaps even the first, her article on procrastinating appeared. That pushed me, another expert procrastinator, to submit a couple of early articles. Others sent materials for inclusion. With Myrna taking on what I saw as the more difficult duty as editor, I offered to handle membership, set up our bank account, make copies and mail the paper newsletter. Someone suggested a contest to come up with a logo. Joanne Alexakis created the design of the ink well and feathered pen in the familiar SKP wagon. Joanne later took on the membership duties and has successfully fulfilled that role for years.\*

*{\*And still does! Thank you, Joanne!}*

*{Betty's summary of our history concludes on [page 16](#)}*



# World of Publishing

by Margo Armstrong

## Latest Publishing Scams

Just in: New information on scammers just waiting to poach on a new self-published author.

## Copyright Trolls

There are many types of trolls out there waiting in the dark nooks of the publishing world. Wikipedia defines a **copyright troll** as a *party (person or company) that enforces copyrights it owns for purposes of making money through strategic litigation, in a manner considered unduly aggressive or opportunistic.*

In other words, they make their content easy to copy and re-post without permission from the troll. Then they use threats of litigation to shake you down for cash settlements.

[Victoria Strauss, in her copyright trolls' article](#), explains this in more detail. Some companies and law firms specialize in copyright threats on behalf of third parties. They seek out infringers filing suit (or threatening to file), demanding large fees to close the claim.

Victoria also describes another attack by CopyTrack, *"Like many people favored with attention from copyright trolls, I was a bit freaked out when I received an email from [CopyTrack](#), an "expert for the global enforcement of image rights" that's widely enough known in trolldom that there are [explainers](#) addressing what to do if they contact you."*

## Copyright Claims Board

There is now a small claims board (CCB.gov) for copyright holders. The Copyright Claims Board is a three-member tribunal with extensive expertise in copyright matters. It provides a streamlined alternative to federal court to resolve copyright disputes. If your claim is under \$30,000 and want help, try CCB.gov first.

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 e-book 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)



"Why do I write? To investigate the mystery of existence. To tolerate myself. To get closer to everything that is outside of me."

—Jhumpa Lahiri

## ULTIMATE GRAMMAR QUIZ! (ANSWER ON PG 15)

Most people could care less that people say irregardless. This misuse should of been nipped in the butt long ago. Maybe they are just escape goats for the broader problems of the decline of education, but even though I have been biting my time here, cringing at the next foe par while they get off scotch free, it's truly a mute point these days. Face it: it's a doggie dog world. I think I'll just go curl up in a feeble position. Ex cetera, ex cetera, ex cetera

## Marisa's Member Profile:

### Donna Gates-Smeall

by Marisa Wolf



Donna Gates-Smeall and her husband Jim have been married 23 years, with no shortage of adventures. They began RVing part time in 2008, and then the 'SMEALLs on Wheels' took their adorable name on the road full time in 2014, until 2019 when unexpected challenges took them back from full-timing. Unfortunately they lost two family members, and Donna got hit by a car while walking to Starbucks for breakfast all in the course of a single year—but thankfully they took the time they needed to rest and recover, and their travels continued. Now they RV periodically, sometimes going west to visit family in Washington, and sometimes wintering in North Carolina and Florida for other family members.

Wherever they go, Donna looks forward to a lovely stay in a KOA, and her favorite stops are Thanksgivings in North Carolina with her sister-in-law, and Christmases in Florida with her parents. While in Florida, Jim is able to do needed maintenance on their RV and Donna rides with her parents in the golf cart parade and spends valuable time with the women in her family.

She gets her writing done in periods of serenity—making her own quiet by taking out her Cochlear implants to create the focus she needs, or streaming music directly to her implants if music is necessary. Writing as D.G. Smeall, she has published two books: "Com-PEN-di-um: A collection of small thoughts on life" and "Down-hearted Dot's Carol" by Karol A. Barkley and D. G. Smeall, both of which can be found on Amazon. Her plans for future writing include compiling a family history all the way back to the Vikings, as well as a family cookbook.

She's clearly inherited excellent taste in food—one of her favorite travel foods is, "hands-down," pizza, which is an excellent choice. For travel days, she has a go-to of Fig Newtons and a Starbucks™ beverage to up the energy, and if they land near an Applebee's, it's mac n cheese with chicken tenders (anyone else getting hungry?).

More recently, she's been removed from writing while life did big life things. She's been using writing here in Penwheels to re-engage herself with writing, much to our benefit. As she digs into the enormity that is "The Cambridge Dictionary to The English Language" by David Crystal, her plan is to pick and choose sections as they appeal to her. Hopefully, her reading and parsing through to share back with the Penwheels community will make the information 'stickier' as she goes through "bit by bit, page by page" to share the valuable lessons within.

Donna's contributions to Penwheels are as important to us as they are to her—and may we get to bask in the joy of her talents for many years to come!

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: Mastering the Art of Tension

by Debra S. Sanders

In the realm of storytelling, tension is the lifeblood that keeps readers on the edge of their seats, flipping through pages. Whether it's a gripping mystery, a heart-pounding thriller, or a historical romance bound by familial obligations, the ability to weave tension into a narrative is the defining line between forgettable and unforgettable stories.

Conflict is the engine that drives a plot forward, and through conflict, tension is born. Whether it's a clash of personalities, a battle against external forces, or a character's internal struggle, we need tension to keep readers invested in the outcome. Writers can ratchet up the tension by introducing obstacles, challenges, and adversaries for the protagonist to overcome.

One way to escalate tension is through foreshadowing, a technique where authors plant the seeds of destiny early on. By hinting at future events or unavoidable catastrophes, we can fill readers with anticipation and even a sense of dread, prompting them to speculate about what happens next. Whether it's a cryptic warning or an innocuous detail that grows more significant as the story unfolds, foreshadowing builds layers of complexity and tension into the narrative.

Mystery and suspense also keep readers guessing by adding uncertainty and apprehension. Strategically withholding information or introducing unexpected twists and turns entices armchair sleuths to connect the dots—and turn pages. A sudden betrayal, shocking revelation, or a race against the clock are great tension builders that keep readers fully engaged in the story.

In addition to the techniques mentioned above, pacing and timing play a crucial role in maintaining tension throughout a story. Controlling the rhythm of the narrative—speeding up during moments of action and slowing down during introspection—allows storytellers to create peaks and valleys of emotion. By paying attention to the ebb and flow of the story, writers ensure that tension is consistently building towards a satisfying (or shocking) climax.

*{Read Deb's conclusion with suggestions for adding tension to your story on [page 17](#)}*

## Links!

Thinking of using AI to help figure out if your work has been plagiarized somewhere? Better get to know why some programs aren't as reliable for detecting copyright infringement as we might believe. More from the hackers at The Markup (they really know their stuff): <https://themarkup.org/machine-learning/2024/01/10/plagiarism-detection-tools-offer-a-false-sense-of-accuracy>

Active on Facebook? You probably should be aware of the thousands of companies monitoring you and what you're doing while on FB. Here's a revealing article about that: <https://themarkup.org/privacy/2024/01/17/each-facebook-user-is-monitored-by-thousands-of-companies-study-indicates>

And here's the link to the report mentioned in it (clicking the link will start a download of the 5.5MG file): [https://innovation.consumerreports.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/CR\\_Who-Shares-Your-Information-With-Facebook.pdf](https://innovation.consumerreports.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/CR_Who-Shares-Your-Information-With-Facebook.pdf)



## Market Share: Romancing Brick and Mortar Stores

by Marguerita McManus

The headline had me at “Sexily Ever After: How Romance Bookstores Took Over America.” I read it three times. Published by *The Guardian*, the article talks about the romance genre sales’ increase in the past few years, a new trend in romance-only bookstores, but more importantly, the reader desire for a memorable shopping experience. Driven by a younger generation of readers, BookTok, and Instagram, they’re calling it, “Love Out Loud,” but the audience is every age range—and at 65 years old, I’d go into one.

The part of the article that had me re-reading delved into what bookstore owners perceive as “a hunger for in-person community meeting spaces.”

I belong to so many groups on Facebook that I can’t list them all, but one is for a small bookstore that’s not even in my town. In fact, it’s close to 200 miles away, but I can’t wait to visit it, something the article states is becoming a trend that pushes the success of these new romance-only brick and mortar bookshops. Events. Not even all book-related.

This may stand out to me more because I’ve spent years of my life as a quilter, going to the guild meetings of several guilds, looking for my quilting tribe. Online, I am still searching for my ‘writer tribe.’ If I have any hope of finding that tribe in person, it will be at that very different bookstore and it will be worth the trip.

The last thing I thought was outstanding about the *Guardian* article was its mention of “ethical buyer/readers,” meaning those who want to buy directly from the author, not an online behemoth. This interests me because Story Origin is putting together a direct sales platform for e-book sales and e-book delivery in partnership with Lemon Squeezy, a payment processing platform.

One last personal note. I plowed through another Amazon Ads Course with Bryan Cohen in January and started running ads again, this time on novels. The first click I received was on the only book I have that touches the romance genre, and the number of impressions (the times Amazon has shown those book covers to shoppers) is split almost 50/50 between one romance book and four contemporary fiction books (a series), and I’m running many more ads on the contemp-fic books than the romance. I think I’ll go change that now.


The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/feb/14/romance-bookstores-across-us>

Story Origin: <https://storyoriginapp.com/> and here’s Evan’s example of what your direct sales page could look like: <https://www.readsherlockholmes.com/sign>

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)







# Slang

by Donna Gates-Smeall

## *Should We Use Slang in Our Writing?*

In life, we are faced with challenges with our comprehension of the English language and sometimes it throws us off balance. I found myself stumbling through such a phase with learning how to use English correctly and appropriately. What I am trying to explain to you lovely writers is that if we use SLANG words, you may confuse your readers.

Have you ever picked up a book that was written by a writer whose style of language was so unlike the ones you were accustomed to hearing? I know I have and it left me feeling cold, lost and confused. Slang is one such linguistic lexicon of the English language that we need to be aware of, for it is often NOT apropos to use it.

There are four reasons why writers need to avoid slang:

1. Slang can be a localized word or phrase which is pertinent to a specific location and could cause your reader to be confused about it if they live elsewhere.
2. Slang evolves quickly and may not have the same impact on a reader five or ten years later.
3. Slang is largely considered unprofessional, especially when it is WRITTEN.
4. Slang can have multiple meanings, causing confusion or offending the reader.

After pointing these reasons out, I hope that I am encouraging writers to realize that their writing should, when writing professional documents, be clear, concise and not muddled with poor word choices. [<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/>]

If you need to use slang words, as it has become part of your writing style, be sure to hone in on the choice of words so as to not confuse your reader.

One of my go-to sources is called Urban Dictionary and is where you can discover whether your slang words are okay for the setting you are writing for. [Urban Dictionary](#) is a crowdsourced English-language online dictionary for slang words and phrases. The website was founded in 1999 by Aaron Peckham. Originally, Urban Dictionary was intended as a dictionary of slang or cultural words and phrases not typically found in standard English dictionaries, but it is now used to define any word, event, or phrase (including sexually explicit content). Words or phrases on Urban Dictionary may have multiple definitions, usage examples, and tags. As of 2014, the dictionary contained over seven million definitions, while around 2,000 new entries were being added daily. Urban Dictionary has also become a repository for racist, bigoted, sexist and antisemitic postings.

In closing, here's a challenge to see if you recognize any slang words in the following sentences:

*Renee is so boujee with her Coach handbag.*

*My mother so lives rent-free in my head that I have begun to resent her presence.*

*Oscar got salty after I failed to text him back right away.*

*Are you totally amped for the concert tonight?*

*{But what about jargon? See more from Donna on [page 10](#)}*

# Jargon

by Donna Gates-Smeall

*If we shouldn't use slang, what about jargon?*

Per [Lumen Learning.com](https://lumenlearning.com), JARGON has 74 synonyms, antonyms, and words related to jargon, such as argot, idiom, lingo, parlance, patois, and SLANG.

In my first article, I shared reasons and situations where SLANG is not appropriate in your writing. Now how does JARGON differ from SLANG?

Jargon can be correctly used to describe technical language in a positive way. OR it can describe language which is overly technical, obscure and pretentious in a negative way.

Some business jargon examples are as follows:

- Bang for your buck—a term that means to get the most for your money
- Best practice—the best way to do something
- Due diligence—putting effort into research before making a business decision
- Drill down—to look at a problem in detail

Another type of jargon could be medical terminology: (Try your hand at figuring out these terms—match the right term with the right condition by drawing a line from the word to the definition.)

Splenectomy	a surgical operation involving the removal of the appendix
Appendectomy	a joint injury involving the tibia and fibula
Carpal tunnel	a surgical operation involving the removal of the spleen
Tibia fibula	fracture located at the base of the hand, just above the wrist between the two largest muscles of the hand.

There are many types of terminology relevant to a line of work/occupation. These were just two of them that I knew I could use to illustrate my point about the differences between slang and jargon.

By the way, no cheating and looking up the words listed here! (Ah ha! I caught you peeking into the dictionary!) Have fun writing and relearning English grammar along the way!

Next time, we will visit the five dimensions of Vocabulary development. Plus if I am lucky enough to get it all read, some tips on how to be the best writer you can be.

Donna Gates-Smeall is an accomplished writer with two books (*Com-PEN-di-um* and *Forever Friends* (co-written with Karol Barkley of Tacoma, WA) under her belt, plus plans to write a few more in her lifetime. She has two Associates degrees and a BA in English.



“We open our mouths and out flow words whose ancestries we do not even know. We are walking lexicons. In a single sentence of idle chatter we preserve Latin, Anglo-Saxon, Norse; we carry a museum inside our heads, each day we commemorate peoples of whom we have never heard.”

— Penelope Lively, *Moon Tiger*

# A Dream Come True!

by Jaimie Bruzenak

Patrick was a huge wombat, weighing in at 88 pounds! Both my sister and I love wombats. They are so cute! In 2017 Georgia and I went to Australia. I saw one in the wild in Tasmania before we met up but we hoped to meet Patrick. We would be driving by Ballarat Wildlife Park, south of Melbourne with Georgia's husband, and his brother and sister-in-law. We ran short of time and missed stopping. We did get to pet one at the Geelong Koala Park a few days later but they wouldn't let us hold one.

When we started planning our trip for 2023, which was taking the Indian Pacific train across Australia, we started looking for a place that might let us actually hold a wombat near Sydney or Perth. Most rescue places weren't encouraging. They were in the business of helping wombats, many stricken by mange. Or rescuing joeys, often found still alive in their mother's pouch when she was a victim of a car. With their long claws, I wondered if it was a question of liability.

Looking in general for tours out of Sydney I found one—Wild Wombat and Kangaroo Day Tour. The photos showed people sitting right up next to one! If we didn't get to hold one, this would be the next best thing. And, though wombats are only found in western Australia and Tasmania, I found a wildlife park in Perth that had wombats. They showed photos of people sitting next to a keeper holding one. Upon inquiry, I found out that for a fee they do let people hold both wombats and koalas. We'd have to check with them a couple of days before our planned visit.

## Bandeela Recreation/Camping Area

The tour out of Sydney had a couple of stops, and we ate meat pies at Robertson's Pie Shop before we ended up at Bandeela Recreation/camping area near Kangaroo Valley. Here wombats come out around dusk to graze and are habituated to humans.



After a leader-prepared kangaroo burger (delicious), we got serious about finding wombats. We found one munching on grass in a big field. It was not one bit distracted by humans sitting beside it. It was totally focused on eating. We saw a few others as well as a couple dozen kangaroos. Kangaroos were more skittish but we could get within 20 feet or so.

## Caversham Wildlife Park

I had stumbled across Caversham Wildlife Park in the Whiteman section of Perth. This privately owned park has all sorts of wildlife—mammals, marsupials, reptiles and birds with nice areas for each.

We signed up to hold both koalas and a wombat. First we each held a koala and had our photos taken with our own phones. It was pretty short as many other people were waiting. We moved to another area to hold Jessie. Unbelievably we each got to hold her for 10 minutes or more and had a wonderful conversation with Deb, the daughter of the couple who founded the park. Jessie weighed about 40 pounds so got heavy! But she closed her eyes and napped, comfortable in our laps with the AirCon blowing on her.



*{Seeing is believing! Read the rest of Jaimie's account and see her with Wombat Jessie on [page 17](#)}*



## Penwheels, for the First Time

by Joanne Alexakis

When Nick & I began full-time RVing in April 1994, it was kind of a lonesome style traveling. Luckily the thrill of finding fabulous new locations, memorable sites, historic statues, and scenic destinations kept us invigorated and enthusiastic. But I was ready for companionship.

We met up with the Escapees RV Club Boomers BoF that Thanksgiving near Nogales, Arizona. These Boomers were having a 'BoomerRang' (a get together of Boomers, of course!), boondocking at a Pena Blanca Lake camping area. About eight or nine rigs were spaced around—parked sort of near to each other, sharing a variety of potlucks and afternoon Happy Hours each day. The Boomers took morning hikes into the surrounding desert, met up for beading groups, helped each other with RVing tips, had writing sessions, and more and more. It was wonderful!

We all were invited to join everything, and we didn't have to join anything if we didn't want to. However I decided to experiment with the writers. I did not consider myself a 'writer'—I mostly wrote letters home to my family and friends. I missed them so much and just knew that they wanted to know how we were faring. With letter writing, you sometimes get a companion letter writer to share your feelings; and you sometimes get folks who never respond, but I would keep trying.

Gathering at a Boomer's RV (I think my first session was in Jaimie Hall Bruzenak's motorhome), we had seven interested people. My sometimes-spectacular & sometimes severely-lacking memory recalls Jaimie, Donna Ellis, DeAnna White, Betty Prange, Judy Francis, maybe Tom Doyle? and me. We all took hold of our pens and notebooks ready to write. It was a timed session (10 minutes). We were presented with the start of a simple statement: "I remember..."; or "I don't understand..."; etc. And we continued writing on that thought for the next 10 minutes. Always writing, never stopping, keeping our pens moving, letting the words flow. At the end of 10 minutes, we all quit writing and read our compositions to each other. Not for critiquing, but for praise for the emotions our pieces stirred in our fellow writers. We were WRITERS!

[This writing exercise was created by Natalie Goldberg in her book, *Writing Down the Bones*. I can email the specific steps for setting up and enjoying this session—just send me an email: joalexakis(at)earthlink.net]

Joanne and Nick Alexakis have been Escapees members since 1992. They began full-time RVing in 1994 and have explored many Escapees benefits (Boomers BoF, Boondockers BoF, Amateur Radio BoF, North Ranch RV Park, Rainbows End RV Park, and CARE) over the years as they travel around the USA. Joanne is active in the Penwheels BoF, holding voluntary positions of newsletter editor in the past and membership coordinator currently. She enjoys the camaraderie of that inspiring RVers' writing group.



“In all things of nature, there is something of the marvelous.”  
—Aristotle

## In a Public Place

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: "Eavesdropping in a public place."*

The plaza was a vibrant green with new spring grass. The trees were beginning to blossom; especially the large peach tree with its glorious pink flowers. The bees and hummingbirds were in their glory with all the fresh nectar available to them.

The young couple was jogging by passed the older couple who were strolling hand in hand at a much slower pace. As the joggers bypassed me I heard one say "Why do old people walk so slowly and block the sidewalk like that?"

I shouted after them, "Because you silly ass, they have taken the time in life to stop and smell the roses as they wandered the roads and byways of life."

I sat on the bench as the older couple passed and I heard the older gentleman say, "Isn't it nice that that young couple has the energy to run like that. I remember when we used to be able to do that. Now with our gnarled old joints it is all we can do to make it to the park just for a leisure stroll."

I watched the older couple as they passed me. She was dressed in a nice plaid suit of wool, with a purple scarf around her neck—a way to fend off the brisk morning air. He had on shorts. He was right about the gnarled old joints. His knees were "bowed and knocked", the liver spots on the legs were abundant.

I thought about the snippets of conversation I had overheard and got images in my mind of their homes.

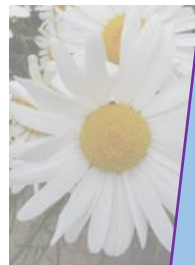
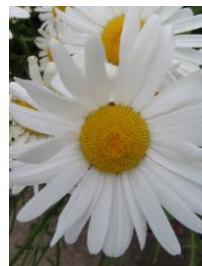
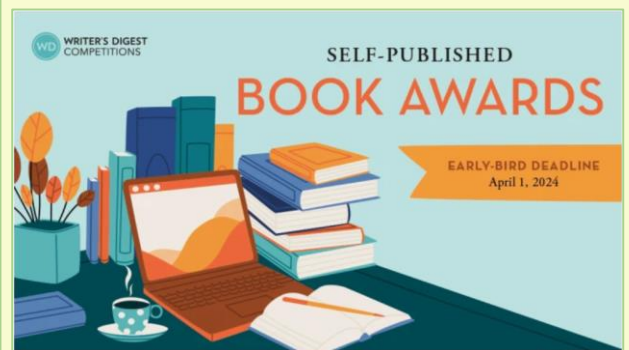
The joggers living room would be full of electronic equipment and every advanced technology known to mankind.

The elder couple would have a living room full of memories. Memoires of the places they had traveled memories of family clearly evident by the pictures on the wall and piano....

*{Editor's Note: Thank you, Charlie, for sending these. Each stirs a memory of my own from Alice Zyetz's fantastic leadership of this wonderful group.}*



## Contest of the Quarter



### 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)

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Flower photos © Ellen Behrens





**"Today a reader,  
tomorrow  
a leader."**

Margaret  
Fuller

**Spring Prompts**

**These are genuine notices from a newspaper (with altered location and phone numbers). Write a story, poem, or essay using either (or both!) as inspiration.**

**GARAGE SALE**  
VACATIONLAND area, 308 Golden Gate Rd. Thursday-Monday, 8am-6pm. My 3-stall garage is full, need to clear out before winter. Exercise equipment, portable generator, 60" and 42" Vizio TVs, huge 6" Christmas village, pine dresser, DVD/VCR tapes, PS1 with games, etc.; lots of tools/supplies (electrical/farm garden and mechanical), many kitchen appliance items; much too much to list. XXX-XXX-XXXX

**MULTI-FAMILY GARAGE SALE**  
Friday 10am-6pm, Saturday 10am-5pm. Furniture, Barbie Dreamhouse, books, antiques, wedding table decorations, and more! Also a lemonade/drink stand

## New Book by Penwheels Member!

Congratulations to Marisa Wolf on the publication of her first solo novel! Here's the blurb:

*An assignment on a backwater world turns deadly for a combat vet and her AI tank. Military SF with heart and humor from up-and-coming author Marisa Wolf.*

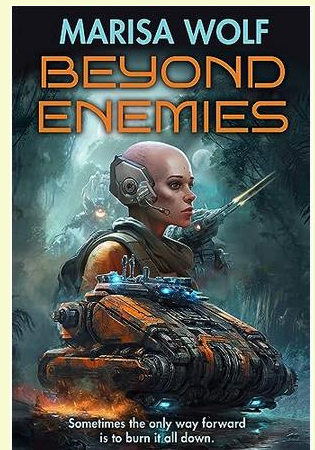
*Sometimes the only way forward is to burn it all down.*

*Talinn Reaze and Bee serve as "Breezy," part of the United Colonial Force's elite Artificial Intelligence Troops. Trained for full integration since before Talinn's birth, they exceeded expectations and became one of the premier heavy tanks, leading assaults on several fronts of the long war against the Interstellar Defense Corps.*

*When they're thrown to a backwater base without cause, boredom becomes their main enemy—until the world falls out from under their treads and they begin to question everything they've ever known.*


*As they orient to their new reality, they have a decision to make: Uphold the status quo, or risk burning civilization to the ground?*

*Talinn and Bee always did have a fondness for fire.*



[You can find more information and details on ordering your copy here.](#)





## In the Beginning... It Was Time

by Lynne Benjamin

{Continued from the [first page](#)}

"You mean, no home—just the trailer? We can't do that!"

"Why can't we do that?" he retaliated.

"A million reasons! To start: we'll never fit everything into the trailer; I'm not willing to give up everything; I can tolerate camping for a couple of weeks, but camping for months is not my idea of fun; I'm not sure I'm ready to retire. I want to leave my options open; we need to have a residence in the Province to keep our health insurance, besides which I need a place to come home to. I need to be grounded, and I'll get bored without a project to work on!"

Our relationship was always what he thinks he wants, what she thinks she wants, and what we can both live with. In this case, the compromise was to upsize our fifth wheel, downsize our belongings and living space, purchase a small secure condo (primarily an expensive storage unit), and I agreed to take a major sabbatical for two years.

This all happened six months before 9-11. By mid-October the adventure began. We were off to find a place where they didn't sell snow shovels. We have downsized to a Class C Motorhome and traveled in three countries, eight provinces and more than 33 states. We have conducted workshops at the Okanogan RV Lifestyle Seminars in BC, seen sights and had adventures we never dreamed of, and each of us found our new passions.

I met Jaimie [Bruzenak] and Alice [Zyetz] (the hearts of the Penwheels BOF at that time) at our first Escapade and I was stung!! I started a Travel Photo Journal BLOG (And Life Goes On) recording our "Travel Adventures" and continued that until we stopped our RV traveling fifteen years later.

I also worked as the Editor of the Penwheels Newsletter for a while. My contact with a few Penwheelers continues as does my obsession with writing. I ended up writing a 'creative non-fiction' book called "Jacob's Tails . . . Back-to-the-Land" that highlights the seven years we spent going back to the land (in the middle of Cape Breton Island) as narrated by our eldest dog (Jacob).

["Jacob's Tail . . ." is only an e-book now and is priced at \$5.00. It can be purchased through Smashwords; Barnes & Noble or from me directly]

Life has changed. My writing and traveling have taken a major hiatus since Fred died. The BLOG became my memoir of the most memorable time of my life.

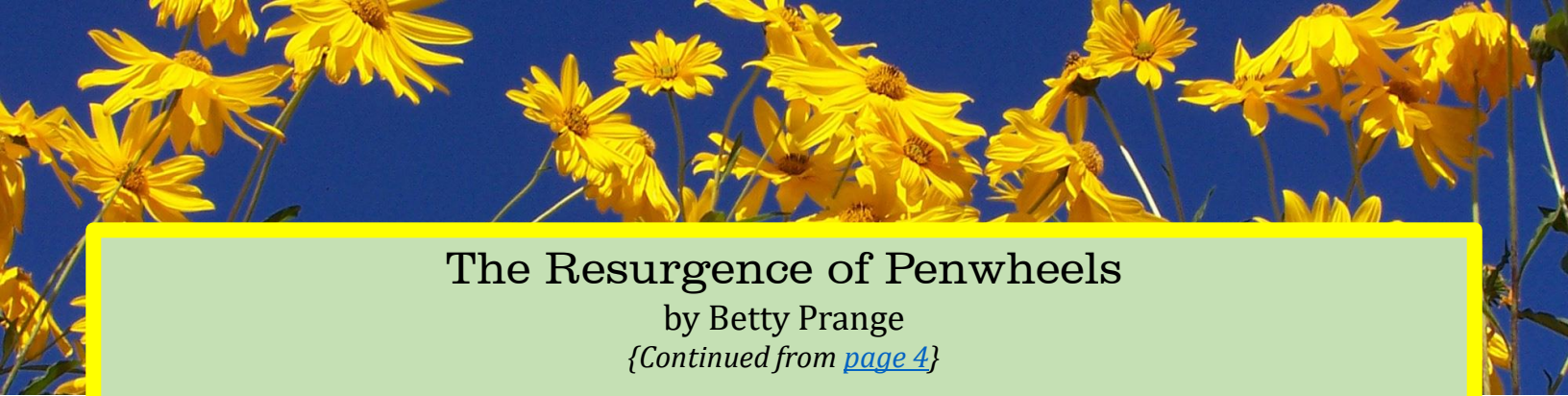
In Lynne Benjamin's 80 years, achieved three university degrees, lived seven years as a "Back-to-the-Land" hippie in the 60s, fulfilled a career as an independent corporate consultant, spent fifteen years travelling in an RV after 48 years living with the same partner.  
(Oh! And she's a former editor of this newsletter ☺)



### ULTIMATE GRAMMAR QUIZ ANSWER (SORT OF...) from [page 5](#)

Okay, this was really meant to be a joke (thanks for sending it, Jaimiel)... but for you diehards out there, here's one attempt at correcting this mess:

*Most people couldn't care less what other people say. This should have been nipped in the bud long ago. Maybe they are just scape goats for the decline of education. I have been biding my time, cringing at the next faux pas while they get off Scot free. It's truly a moot point. Let's face it: it's a dog-eat-dog world. I think I'll just curl up in a fetal position. Et cetera...*



## The Resurgence of Penwheels

by Betty Prange

{Continued from [page 4](#)}

When Myrna and I were ready to retire, others stepped forward. We have had a number of editors, each doing an excellent job of putting together the collective offerings. Some have added their own editorials or columns. They have kept us informed and in the loop with fellow writers.

Technology changed and the original paper newsletter now goes to most members electronically. As more and more members used electronic media, Jaimie Hall Bruzenak and Alice Zyetz set up our electronic bulletin board to supplement the quarterly newsletter. I've enjoyed the discussions of how publishing has changed in the electronic age and how members reach out with helpful ideas to other members.

The other catalyst was that several of us had done some writing exercises under the leadership of Alice Zyetz, and that had inspired us and encouraged us to seek out other writers on the road.

She started the writing groups at a Boomer BOF gathering in Pena Blanca. That whole summer we would do writing exercises when we met up. Alice also started the writing group at Jojoba Hills.\* It was the next year or so that we decided to revive Penwheels but Myrna was done with being editor. That's when I took over. I was editor for two years. Myrna did participate in some writing groups, primarily at Quartzsite when she and Gerry met the Boomers there. Plus she was very encouraging to all of us "newbies" and was an inspiration.

We did make a go of this BOF. Members have contributed and kept it vibrant. Keep up the good work everyone and may your writing flow smoothly.

*{\* Editor's Note: I also have Alize Zyetz to thank for involving me in Penwheels. We'd just arrived as visitors at Jojoba Hills in early winter of 2009 when she showed up in the driveway, eager to invite me to the weekly writing group there and to encourage me to join this group. I miss Alice all the time, and I know I'm not the only one. – EB}*

## More Links!

If you're wondering what the common tropes are for fantasy fiction, Robert Lee Brewer has a great article on them in *Writer's Digest* here (with a link to what "tropes" are): <https://www.writersdigest.com/write-better-fiction/popular-fantasy-tropes-for-writers>

Looking for the perfect gift for a fellow writer or reader? [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 😊

We know Penwheels is your favorite writing organization ;-)) but if you're intent on finding another writing community, *Writer's Digest* has a good list of choices here: <https://www.writersdigest.com/be-inspired/writing-organizations-for-writers-to-check-out>



## Fiction Tips: Mastering the Art of Tension

by Debra S. Sanders

{Continued from [page 7](#)}

Here are a few suggestions for adding tension to your story:

1. Give your protagonist an immediate “need” or “want” without a solution.
2. Introduce threats to health, safety, finances, or emotional security.
3. Use ethics or morality to pull your character in two directions.
4. Create an event that induces shame, guilt, or embarrassment.
5. Weave in a situation that requires skills or knowledge beyond what your character possesses and make a successful outcome depend on them overcoming the obstacle.

The act that creates tension is important, but even more so are the emotions caused by the act. Describe how your character is dealing with the event by using the five senses. Do they have headaches or low energy? Could their throat constrict, making them unable to speak? Nostrils flared by pungent odors? Voices reverberating in their head like static? Squeezing their eyes together to erase a vivid memory? How your character reacts is how your reader will feel.

Adding tension to a fictional story is both an art and a science, requiring writers to balance elements such as conflict, foreshadowing, suspense, pacing, and timing. With practice, you can master these techniques and create narratives that are not only thrilling and suspenseful but also emotionally resonant. And that's the mark of a good storyteller.

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>



## A Dream Come True!

by Jaimie Bruzenak

{Continued from [page 11](#)}



Most wombats are quite shy and will run into their burrows at any sign of a human or other danger. They can run quite fast and dig a new burrow quickly. Two things make them especially unique. Their marsupial pouch is upside down with the opening to the back end. This is to keep dirt out of the pouch when they are digging. The other is an bony armor-like plate on their rear end. They will squash prey such as dingoes between their butt and the top of their burrow. They exert a tremendous amount of force and the plate does not yield. Jessie fell out of her mother's pouch when she was too young to survive on her own so she was hand-raised by Deb. She is comfortable around humans. The wild ones in the park near Sydney are in a protected area and used to humans so allow them to get closer. These encounters were the highlight of our trip!

Jaimie Bruzenak began writing about travel, RVing and working on the road while full-time RVing with her late husband Bill. It led to writing and working for [Workamper.com](http://Workamper.com) and publishing books and articles, some with her co-author Alice Zyetz. She now resides in Tucson, AZ, in an over-55 mobile home park, still traveling, but no longer by RV.



"Some of us are here to write, whether it's honored or supported by society, and whether it's paid or not. For me, and others like me, writing is the shimmering aura through which we see the world. It is the quiet and courageous act of creative expression that nourishes our souls. It is the subtle power that aligns us with ourselves. It is what we offer to others."

--Kathleen Melin

*From "Radiant Fog: One Writer's Life in Rural America," an essay in the May/June 2023 issue of Poets & Writers*

## May is Mystery Month and....

...we all love to travel, right? How about a World Mystery Trip? Yep, there's an app for that! Or at least a company willing to trade your dollars for to send you on a mystery trip someplace in the world. Intrigued? Click here for details (though it appears that the biggest mystery is how much this might cost you!):

<https://www.worldmysterytrips.com/>

If you decide to do this, you MUST tell us all about it!

## Who Was...

Ramón Felipe San Juan Mario Silvio Enrico Smith Heathcourt-Brace Sierra y Alvarez-del Rey y de los Verdes? Well, that's what Lester del Rey used to say his real name was. So... who was he, anyway?

Some say he's the person who invented the fantasy genre. If you're a fan or writer of these books, this article from *Slate* about how it all came about is fascinating: <https://slate.com/culture/2023/10/lester-del-rey-invention-fantasy-book-publishing.html>

## Spring Observances

### March

- Mustache March
- National Colon Cancer Awareness Month
- Women's History Month
- Youth Art Month

### April

- National Poetry Month
- National Poetry Writing Month
- National Volunteer Month
- Second Chance Month

### May

- National Bike Month
- National Military Appreciation Month
- Zombie Awareness Month

## Happy 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to eBooks!

The first ebooks were published in 1999. If your books have been released in e-book format, when did your first e-book appear? Was it a good experience? Bad? What did you learn from it? What changes have you seen in e-book publication over the last 25 years? What do you think the future of ebooks will be? Why? Tell us all about it! Send your first e-book experience to [penwheels@yahoo.com](mailto:penwheels@yahoo.com) to share it with fellow Penwheelers.



*Give in to the temptation to share!*

**Deadlines are always:**

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

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

## 2024 Win-Win Contest *Special 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 at [penwheels@yahoo.com](mailto:penwheels@yahoo.com). Put "Win-Win Contest Entry" in the subject line of the e-mail. [See page 18 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, special memories of a Penwheels gathering, particular advice you took because of something you read here—generally, anything that celebrates how being a Penwheels member has helped you. 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, RV travels, and/or involvement in Penwheels). Word length: 500-750 words preferred. 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?

Every Penwheels member! If you've never contributed to the newsletter before or if it's been a long time since you've sent something in, 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, poem, story or 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?

Previous winners have received \$5 or \$10 Amazon gift certificates or EB Unique bracelets (winner's choice). 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 [penwheels@yahoo.com](mailto:penwheels@yahoo.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!*