



PENWHEELS

For Escapees Writers... Published or Not

Spring

2025



Why and How I Wrote a Novel *by Kay Black*

During my working years, I owned and operated several entrepreneurial businesses after being a flight instructor and teaching my three children and others to fly. I enjoyed writing family letters, receiving compliments as to how interesting they were. After a particular funny/scary boating incident, I had an article published in our sailing club magazine. I delved into children's stories for our grandchildren's enjoyment. When my husband retired, we started RVing; he was used to traveling in his airline job. Our travels gave me plenty to write about.

My family letters included descriptions of places we toured—Alaska, NE Canadian provinces and the contiguous U.S. I had articles published in an RV club magazine. Most of my writing was memoir, or short stories I submitted to a writing group I joined. Until....

[Until what?!? Read the rest of Kay's article on [page 13](#)]

Editor's Note *from Ellen Behrens*

We're thrilled to see new names appear in this issue of the newsletter! We welcome for the first time—or maybe welcome back after a long absence—Kay Black, Marcia Robin Gardner Prigger, and Deborah Powell. We hope each will share more of their wonderful writing.

If you're reading this, thinking, "I could never send in something I've written," I hope you'll think again. **Penwheels is a supportive, inspiring group.** Consider getting your work included as a way of cheering you on. And who doesn't welcome that in a world of a solitary writer?!?

Not sure what to write about? Carol Ann Quibell offers up some terrific prompts on [page 14](#). And if those don't inspire you, think of alternatives. If you're still drawing a blank, pick out an item nearby and start writing about it. Where did it come from? Why is it there? Follow every tangent, see where they lead. Eventually you'll have something. And something is always better than a blank page.

Three years of editing this newsletter have flown by! And although I get a genuine bang out of doing this, it's time to step aside and let someone else have some fun. Please see [page 13](#) to find out how YOU can help!

Wishing you warm spring breezes,
Ellen



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... and much more!

Braggin' Rights

Contributed by Joanne Alexakis

In the Nov/Dec 2024 *Escapees* magazine, Lucinda Belden's new book, *The Perfect RV Experience*, is showcased in the "From the Bookshelf" column (page 32). Her 500 page manual is especially handy for beginning RVers. (Look for a separate announcement with a link and more details on [page 15](#).)



Jaimie's Tips

Contributed by Jaimie Bruzenak

Angela Hoy of *Writers Weekly* and Booklocker Publishing shared a list of publishers authors should avoid at all cost. If you are remotely thinking about publishing a book, you should save this list somewhere to potentially avoid losing a lot of money and even being scammed.

<https://writersweekly.com/angela-desk/a-list-of-publishers-that-all-authors-should-avoid-at-all-costs>

Knowing how many RVers are also readers, some of these paying markets might want an article on this hobby. "12 Paying Needlework, Textile, and Jewelry-Making Markets for Writers" by Karoki Githure in the 12/19/24 *Writers Weekly*.

<https://writersweekly.com/marketing-secrets/12-paying-crafting-markets-for-writers-by-karoki-githure>

Ed Catmull, President of Pixar and Walt Disney Animation Studio and author of *Creativity Inc.*, was interviewed by Tim Ferris for the book *The Tools Of Titans*. In it, Catmull said:

"The final film bears no relationship to what we start out with. All our films to begin with suck. We had to start over internally with *Toy Story II*. We had to do it with *Ratatouille*. All of our films to begin with suck."

Read more about creativity here:

<https://herondanceartjournal.substack.com/p/about-the-creation-of-heron-dance>



Little Free Library in Coronado, California

*[Thanks, Jaimie! And if **you've** seen a Little Free Library (registered or not), share an image! Just send it to Ellen to see it in this newsletter.]*

Discounts & Free Books March 2 – 8, 2025



"When you are in the middle of [writing] a story it isn't a story at all, but only a confusion; a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood; like a house in a whirlwind, or else a boat crushed by the icebergs or swept over the rapids, and all aboard powerless to stop it. It's only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all." (Margaret Atwood in "Alias Grace," 1996)

Prompting You!

Inspiration from
Carol Ann Quibell



I thought I might tell you a little bit of how the prompts for this issue came to my mind.

The first prompt, which seems to have hit a cord with two of our members, came from a time I spent in the hospital in 2001. I had surgery and this was the first time I was able to get out of bed. As I staggered into the bathroom, my head started spinning and I grabbed onto the sink for support and looked up into the mirror. Imagine my shock when I saw my grandmother's face in the mirror! Except it wasn't her—it was me! It was the first time I realized I resembled her, and since I loved her a lot, it gave me a reassuring feeling and I never forgot that day.

Prompt #1: Why is my grandmother's face in the mirror?

The second prompt was brought about by the fall colors I was surrounded by. Whenever I think of this time of year, I remember a trip I took with my aging parents to the area where they were raised. We were there in the fall and the colors were magnificent! I drove my dad to every "old" friend he knew, so they could reminisce and spend time together. It was a very memorable trip and my photos are outstanding.

Prompt #2: The yellow and gold leaves glittering in the sunlight bring me back to my past.

The third prompt: I spent two years in the interior of British Columbia and tried to get out almost every day for a hike which led me up a hill where I had found a Wander Lodge motorhome that had been abandoned. Since one of my dreams included owning a Wander Lodge motorhome, it hurt me to see it sitting abandoned amongst the trees, with its windows smashed out and wild animals using it as their home. I wanted to restore it in the worst way, but it wasn't meant to be.

Prompt #3: The abandoned motorhome in the farmer's field looks lonely.



See what these prompts inspired, starting on the next page!
Join the fun! See [page 14](#) for Summer prompts!



Sun Today
a haiku by
Marcia Robin Gardner Prigger

Chilly but not cold
Rare day in midst of winter
May it pass slowly

Prompting You!

Penwheels Members Share Their Results



Why Is My Grandmother's Face in the Mirror?

by Deborah Powell

This morning, I lingered in front of the bathroom mirror. The lines, wrinkles, and age spots covering my roundish face with the now-prominent cheekbones, the slightly slanted eyes, and the thick hair exhibited my unusual mix of ethnicities and cultures. In my own reflection, I could see my two grandmothers, so diametrically different from one another, but with much in common.

Both women were children of immigrants. Both lost their spouses at a young age, forced to raise their families alone with limited means, having to work hard to survive, and neither one remarried.

My paternal grandmother's parents hailed from Japan, settling on the island of Kauai. Her name was Ichiko Suenaga Yoshida. She and my grandfather had four children: three sons and a daughter. My father was only 10 when his father passed. "Granny," as we called her, had to take work as a maid in a local hotel. Her sons helped support the family, picking pineapples during the harvest season. I recall Granny as a quiet, demure Japanese woman with a barely-audible voice (she swallowed a fish bone when young which damaged her vocal cords), petite and slim, with thick black hair, high cheekbones, age spots on her face, and weathered hands. A devout Buddhist, she was calm and serene. However, despite her demeanor, we all knew she was in charge – her authority was inaudibly apparent. She lived a long life, passing at age 95.

In contrast, my maternal grandmother, Miriam Gladden Levin, was the polar opposite of Granny. We called her "Gramma." She grew up in Chicago, born of Jewish immigrants from Poland and Russia. The family eventually moved to Los Angeles, where my grandparents met, married, and had two daughters. Similarly, my mother was 10 when her father died, forcing Gramma to get a job to support the family, working as a bookkeeper for a small candy company. Gramma was far from quiet and demure – she was a bit larger than life, in both body and personality. A formidable woman, she spoke her mind, told off-color jokes, and lived a rather unconventional lifestyle. I can still envision her with a cigarette in hand, the broad smile on her round face, and tight curls in her short hair. She was the person I called when I was upset or sad. I recall her patiently listening to me cry when my beloved hamster died. Sadly, Gramma succumbed to diabetes complications at age 65.

Standing in front of the mirror, I think of them fondly and miss them. I regret not having been able to spend more time with them. But, as I take a second look at myself, I'm happy to see them in my own face. Although my life has been far easier than theirs, my wrinkles, lines, and age spots represent a myriad of experiences, joys, sorrows, and hopefully, a reflection of my grandmothers' determination, love, and inner strength.

Prompting You!

Penwheels Members Share Their Results



Grandmother's Reflection

by Janetta Fudge Messmer

"Joseph, you never met my grandmother, but if I spot one more wrinkle on my face, you'll be living with a spitting image of her," I speak to my hubby, but I guarantee he didn't hear what I said. The reason why—he's propped up on the pillows, working on his laptop. Earbud in place.

As I'm about to exit the bedroom, I decide to leave Joseph alone. He's heard me bemoaning my looks too many times. So, I head out the door and as I round the corner, I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror hanging in the hallway. "Yep, nothing has changed from two minutes ago."

I reach the kitchen and bring out the air fryer. Then I fetch the bacon out of the fridge. While separating it, a thought hit me—anyone who knows me has heard me joke about my appearance, and how I resemble Granny Bert. Why worry about it?

But I do. And in all honesty, I hate the fact I've neglected to take care of my skin as I aged. It could have been different. Years ago, I'd been warned by a teenager at a fast-food place to improve on my morning and night regimen when he said, "Ma'am, with the senior discount, that will be \$3.25."

The pimpled-faced kid had dared to utter those unforgiveable words to me while I paid for my food. And what made the moment even worse, I was only thirty-two and my brother, who was three and a half years older than me, had breezed right through the line before me and paid full price for his greasy fare.

As God is in heaven, I wanted to cause a scene by throwing the disrespectful punk the whole amount of money I owed him, but I refrained. Jail time, on top of being viewed as elderly in front of my sibling, wasn't on my radar for the day.

Anyway, more than thirty years have passed since that fateful day. I realize as the appliance in front of me sizzles, I can't do anything about my wrinkles, other than have a facelift. But I can do a video where I plead with twenty and thirty-somethings to moisturize, moisturize, and moisturize even more.

I can see it now. My face on camera—creases and all for the whole wide world to see—is sure to go viral. And when I became an overnight sensation, I'll—

"Annabelle, I heard you earlier, and I know you won't believe me, but you're gorgeous. And by the way, is that bacon I smell?"

"Yes, it is, but you'll have to fix your own breakfast. I have a video to make. See you later. Granny Bert will be so proud."

Prompting You!

Penwheels Members Share Their Results



The Abandoned Motorhome

by Jaimie Bruzenak

In our RV travels, we passed more than one abandoned motorhome. Once someone's pride and joy, they were now a sad remembrance, slowly deteriorating in the sun and weather. One derelict RV even had a For Sale sign; the owner still hopeful he'd recuperate part of his investment.

Today, if I passed one, I'd take a second look. It might be the used 32' 1982 Pace Arrow motorhome that Bill and I traveled in, now 45 years old. It's unlikely still on the road though it was a trusty home for us for eight years. After test driving a used Bouncer that lived up to its nickname of Bouncer, we toyed with the idea of a 5th wheel but abandoned that due to cost. We answered an ad for a Pace Arrow that not only had low mileage but included an immaculate Jeep Wrangler. Even better, they would hold it until we sold our house. A red Coleman canoe we bought in the Tetons became a permanent fixture on our roof and an identifying feature along with our black Jeep Wrangler—the Halls are here! A Suzuki Sidekick replaced the Jeep in 1997.

As full-time RVers we were Workampers, working in a national park in the summer, and wintering either with family or in the Arizona desert. I held many a Penwheels writing groups inside my rig over the years.

When parked in the desert, Bill washed the motorhome at any sign of dirt or dust. He had it down to a science and could wash the rig with only one bucket of water. Often other men would give him a bad time.

After eight years of full-timing Bill was lusting after a newer, larger diesel motorhome. At the time, we could buy a house for what that would cost - and we did! We bought a truck and camper and tried to sell the Pace Arrow. However, no one wanted to pay the bluebook value for it, or, didn't have the cash.



The following year, my writing partner and co-author, Alice Zyetz and her husband Chuck had an accident with their truck and 5th wheel. We sold them our motorhome to live in on their lot in Jojoba. When they got their rig back, they in turn sold it to a family who liked to ride in the sand dunes west of Yuma. The dinette that Bill had removed to put in a computer desk was immediately replaced with a used dinette by the new owners!

What ever happened to our Pace Arrow? Is it still on the road or sitting lonely in a farmer's field somewhere? It took us across the country, up to Alaska and back and roamed the West. It led to adventures we never had imagined and created memories I'll never forget. The Escapees slogan is "Home is where you park it," and indeed it was and wherever it is, I'll be ever grateful for that time and those years.

Prompting You!

Penwheels Members Share Their Results



Eddie Saw Grandma When He Looked in the Mirror

by Guest Contributor C. Russell Parker

It was always the same when Eddie looked into the mirror. He felt like Grandma F. was looking back at him, and he looked very much like her. It was never Grandma T. Eddie thought both of his grandmothers were pretty and he loved them both equally.

Eddie was only five years old and did not have a large vocabulary when his mother Murtle told him, “Son, I understand it is disconcerting to see Grandma F. looking back at you. But Eddie, it is really you, not Grandma F., in the mirror. If you could look in the mirror with your back to it and spin from the back, fast enough to see the whole picture, you look exactly like Grandma T. from behind. You are probably a little young to understand what I am about. I will try now and do it again when you are a little older,” Murtle stated.

“Eddie you are a Frog-Urtle! You are 3 feet wide 10 inches tall, very green, and even though you have 7 eyes you will need glasses to see. All your brothers and sisters are either frogs or turtles. You are the only Frog-Urtle. When you look into the mirror you see Grandma Frog—because the Frog portion of you is in your forward body. You look like Grandma Turtle from the back because your turtle shell is on the back portion of your back. Now Eddie, go outside and play, but bring me some moss and soaked tree roots so I can make your favorite for dinner, root entangled moss with chopped lily pads.”

Eddie went back into the pond, swimming as fast as he could, to a large lily pad. He got on top of the pad. As loud as he could yell, “Come join me on my lily pad, come play with me little frogs and little turtles.”

Then he began to sing, “I am a Frog-Urtle. A Frog-Urtle, a Frog-urtle. I am 3 feet wide, 10 inches tall, very green, with 7 eyes. I am magic; when I look in a mirror, I see my grandma Frog. If I could see the mirror from the back, I would look like granny Turtle.

I am different, yet the same!

You can play with me, I won’t hurt you. “You can say my friend is a Frog-Urtle. He is 3 feet wide, 10 inches tall, very green and has 7 eyes, but doesn’t see well. You can tell people I see my grandmothers in the mirror when I look at myself.”

“Not everyone gets a special friend like A Frog-Urtle. We live in the swamp-pond.

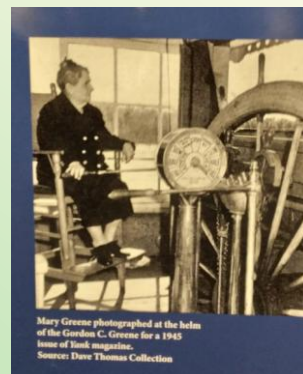
Do you think there might be special creatures in the non-swamp world? I wonder if they are treated differently. I’m proud to be a Frog-Urtle. I hope others are proud of who they are—we are each our own creature!! I hope they have friends!

2 Months, 20 States and 3 Provinces, 10,000 Miles: My First Road Trip as Retiree – Part 2

by Sabine Hartmann

[You can read Part 1 of Sabine's journey in the Winter 2025 issue. Have you made a memorable journey you'd like to share? We'd love to include it in the newsletter. Just [e-mail Ellen](#) and tell her about it!]

On the way to Michigan's Upper Peninsula, I stopped at the amazing Wisconsin Maritime Museum in Manitowoc, exploring artifacts from the "Shipwreck Coast" and learning about female pirates and captains who were active on the Great Lakes.



In Michigan, dense forests enveloped the highways again and the bugs were absolutely fierce. I made a couple of new "Yupper" friends and was invited to camp in their backyard. (For the uninitiated: "Yupper" comes from "U.P.", which stands for Upper Peninsula.) The three days I spent there passed almost too quickly and I promised to come back.



After a two-hour drive, I reached the Canadian border at Sault Sainte Marie where I visited the Canadian Bush Plane Heritage Center, as a respite from driving. I especially appreciated their movie on fighting wildfires, reminding me of the many fires burning in the west every summer.

I changed direction and headed south to Toronto where I was going to spend some time with a Swiss girlfriend from when we both lived in Geneva, Switzerland. She has settled in Toronto, and I hadn't seen her for 30 years. The drive took me through stunning landscapes along Lake Huron. I arrived in Toronto at the same time as night fell and a thunderstorm exploded overhead. It was rather epic trying to find my way through a maze of 8+ lane freeways. After two hours of fighting traffic and downpour in the dark, I made it to my friend's house in Mississauga.



The heatwave had by now caught up with me. My friend from Maine was still stuck in the Bahamas (long story), and so I spent two wonderful weeks with my Swiss friend and her family, walking their dogs, learning to cook new foods as taught by her Jamaican husband, catching up on the 30 years that had passed, spending quality time with her, going to the Royal Canadian



Museum, and also enjoying shopping with prices in Canadian dollars. On the day we spent time at Lake Ontario, we also discovered a cheese shop selling nothing but cheese. I exclaimed "This smells like Switzerland!" when I stepped inside. Indeed, it smelled just like the dairy of my childhood village.

Not wanting to outstay my welcome, I hit the road again after two weeks. Since my Maine friend was still not home, I let the "trip take over"... meaning I adapted to the situation by heading further east.

[See how Sabine's journey ends on [page 16](#).]

Fiction Tips: The Power of Collaboration

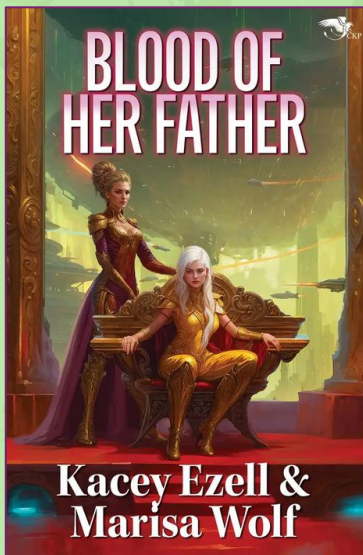
by Marisa Wolf

So far I've co-written nine novels, and I'd do it again (insert maniacal laugh here). I've been incredibly lucky with all five of my co-authors, though each is wildly different. Authors team up for any number of different reasons—increase productivity, set someone else up to take over an existing series, mesh complimentary skills or experiences—and in any number of ways.

My first novel was co-authored with one of my best friends, and honestly is probably the only reason I was able to get over my chronic inability to finish stories. Accountability—probably not a leading cause for author team-ups, but certainly one that worked for me earlier in my career.

There are pros and cons, as there are with all things. Sometimes our writing can be very personal, and involving someone else can become...fraught. If co-authoring might be in your future, I'm always happy to talk to other writers, and you can email me any time! In the meantime, here are the top four priorities that I've learned make co-writing work.

Aligned Goals – Before you get started, make sure you want the same things. Artistically: the storyline, the character arcs, the tone, language, and nature of the book. Detail-wise: what's your timeline? What's the idea for editing, for publishing, for a target audience? Maybe your writing styles are similar, and maybe they aren't—it can work either way, but helps to know going in.



Communication – In most cases, co-authoring is a relationship and involves the authors working together. And what's super important in relationships? Ok, I gave the answer away in the title. I can't stress enough how much this matters. Before you even get started, be clear on how you want to proceed E.g.: do you want to exchange comments in the document? Have weekly phone calls or text touchpoints? Do reflection meetings at key plot points? Stand-by to hop on quick calls when the story gets a little sticky? It might shift once you're in the midst of it but have a plan to deviate from. Also, take it from someone who plotted the same novel THREE times: Write. It. Down. When you talk, confirm which of you is taking notes and make sure to send it to the other. Alas, enthusiasm alone will not always keep the details straight in your brains.

Decision-making – What are you going to do if/when you disagree on something? It might be a plot point, a character choice, language use, small details or big. It might never happen, but you don't want to muddle through how to decide in the thick of it, when emotions can be involved. Sometimes it's obvious—if a more experienced author has invited you into their established intellectual property, they're the lead author, and they get final decision. Maybe you have a senior author/junior author process. Maybe you let coin or dice decide if you get really stalled (with the caveat that, in case coin/dice got it wrong, you can unanimously choose to flip it). Maybe one of you makes the call for certain characters, or for emotional beats, or for huge plot points. Again, you might never need to use it—I rarely have—but it's vital to know your approach. Better to have it and not need it, than need it and not have it.

[What else is helpful when working with another writer? Read Marisa's conclusion on [page 17](#).]

Market Share: 1,000 True Fans

by Marguerita McManis

Every day it's important to find a beacon of positivity and hope. For writers, that beacon can be found in a timeless piece of wisdom from Kevin Kelly: the concept of "1,000 True Fans." This simple yet powerful idea suggests that creators don't need millions of followers to succeed. Instead, by cultivating a loyal base of 1,000 true fans who genuinely support your work, you can achieve sustainable success and fulfillment. But how do you start? Let's begin by finding just five true fans.

As Kelly insightfully pointed out, a true fan is someone who will purchase anything you create. These are the individuals who eagerly await your next book, seek out your recommendations, and are excited to share your work with others. Finding your true fans is all about nurturing genuine connections, and it can begin with just a handful of dedicated supporters.

A good start would be identifying your five most enthusiastic readers—those who have shown interest and appreciation for your writing, perhaps through engaging emails, feedback, or social media interactions. Reach out to these individuals personally. Thank them for their support, and share with them your vision, dreams, and upcoming projects. Ask them kindly to become your ambassadors, recommending your books to five of their friends who share similar tastes or interests.

This grassroots method aligns perfectly with our often nomadic lifestyle as RV travelers. Perhaps you've met some of these fans at a campsite, during a writing club gathering, or while sharing stories around a fire. Use these connections to build a foundation of support that extends beyond digital screens to real-world interactions, enriched by shared experiences and personal stories.

The beauty of this approach lies in its exponential potential. With each fan reaching out to five others, your network grows organically and authentically. More importantly, it creates a ripple effect of enthusiasm—a positive chain reaction where readers can't wait to pass on the joy your writing brings. In this way, your group fosters a community centered around mutual respect and appreciation for storytelling.

Much like our journeys on the road, the path to finding and growing true fans is not about speed, but about the quality of the connections we make along the way. It's about sharing our unique narratives and finding resonance with others who are touched by them.

I like to keep Kevin Kelly's inspiring words close: a small number of true fans can indeed be the key to fulfillment and success. For those readers interested in delving deeper into Kelly's profound insights, I highly recommend visiting his original article: <https://kk.org/thetechnium/1000-true-fans/>.

By cultivating genuine relationships with a few dedicated supporters, we set the wheels in motion for a cascade of creativity and connection that can transform our writing careers. Here's to the exciting journey of discovering and cherishing our true fans—one heartfelt connection at a time. Safe travels and happy writing!

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



Yes, the world of Artificial Intelligence, (AI), is starting to have its effect on the publishing world. What was in the past an expensive and not very financially rewarding attempt to bring our books to Amazon Audio has turned the corner. Last year Amazon introduced its *beta* innovative Virtual audio program. With no startup costs, it brings to the public the audio version of its already published books. Without self-narrating (a very time-consuming process) or hiring a professional narrator, an author can now use Amazon's virtual software in a matter of minutes.

There is no actual editing ability, but you can change pronunciation, voice speed, and pausing. In order for it to qualify for this free service, your book must have a table of contents (from your e-book version), no large white spaces, and should not contain restricted content. To find out if your book is eligible for the virtual version, go to the Bookshelf in your Amazon account. Next to the title of your book may be an invitation to create an audio book.

There are multiple voice choices available, male and female. Set your own price from \$3.99 to \$14.99, but Amazon sells it for \$1.99 as an "add on" when buying the e-book.

To change any words misspoken by the narrator, use the "pronounce" tool, to change the emphasis, use the "voice speed" tool, and add a "pause" where necessary. This does require you to listen to the entire book and make any corrections necessary along the way, but, wow, how perfect is this? I am impressed with the outcome. Converting about seven of my e-books to virtual audio convinced me that Amazon has a winner here. The 40% commission on sales makes any time spent tweaking the beta virtual version worthwhile.

Enroll the e-book in Kindle Unlimited, the virtual audio book is automatically set too. The 90-day commitment applies here as well. Yes, the KDP proprietary lock on the MP3 applies. If new to Amazon, publish the e-book first; the invitation to publish the virtual book follows. It might be wise to read the Help files on Amazon.com first to get all the details. Unpublish any Amazon version, e-book; paperback; hard cover; or virtual audio, at any time.

My experience with ACX, the other audio service that Amazon uses, is the exact opposite. It takes weeks to record and upload the content; very little commission is paid on sales; and the cost runs into the 100s of dollars if you pay a narrator. Recording it yourself demands weeks of extra time.

KDP Virtual Audio once again offers something to the world of writers and publishers at no cost and with a chance to succeed. Right now we the people certainly need all the help we can get. This is the way the world should work: Always give a hand up to those that have the least advantage, not the least motivation. This philosophy makes the world successful for everyone, yes, some more than others.



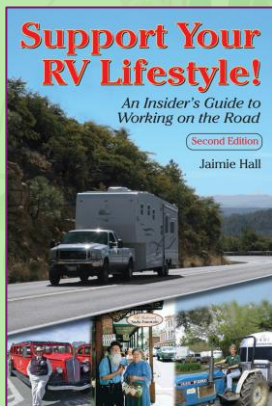
*Margo Armstrong is the author and publisher of over 20 books now available on Amazon. Her book "Writing and Publishing Books for Fun and Profit" is available in eBook, paperback and now **audio** format. Listen to her podcast "RV Lifestyle Expert" on your favorite podcast platform (now available on Amazon Music). Contact Margo at <mailto:MovingOnWithMargo@outlook.com>*

Member Profile: JAIMIE BRUZENAK

I started full-time RVing with my late husband, Bill Hall, on Election Day 1992. We sold everything, knowing we would not want to go back. We were not happy with our jobs either. Since we were only 47, it would mean we would have to work. We focused on national parks because the pay was good. Between us, over the eight years we were RVing, we worked in 7 different national parks.



Some great things happened on the road. We were able to earn a living and even save money. We had wonderful adventures. And I am still friends with people I met through Boomers and Penwheels. In fact, I now live in an over-55 mobile home park because of one of them. The other great thing was becoming an author and publishing several books.



I had been interested in career and job possibilities since my teaching days. When we began RVing, we subscribed to Workamper News. We were offered jobs but held out for a national park. I was successful at writing resumes that got job offers and was intrigued with ways to make money. I was collecting ideas for making money and became a resource for Boomers looking for work. Joe and Kay Peterson had written a book on working on the road, but it was short on specifics, and I thought a how-to book would be helpful to those needing to work. I finally got serious about actually writing it in 2000. My friend and former Penwheeler and Boomer, Stephanie Bernhagen had written and self-published a book titled *Take Back Your Life: Live Full-time in an RV*. She was my mentor. In the meantime, I was writing for Workamper News and had articles published in other magazines. After *Support Your RV Lifestyle! An Insider's Guide to Working on the Road* was published, I taught classes at educational events for Workamper, Escapees and others.

When you have a book to sell, it is up to you to do the marketing even if you traditionally publish. When you self-publish like me, it is totally up to you. I had a blog, which featured photos of our travels or items of interest to RVers; a newsletter and a website. After my first book, Alice Zyetz and I teamed up to write several more books. *RV Traveling Tales: Women's Journeys on the Open Road*, brought us great pleasure. *Traveling Tales* is an anthology and many Penwheeler and Boomer friends have pieces in that book. It was very rewarding to see their delight in being in print! I like having a focus when traveling and writing and blogging about travel and RVing gave me that focus. I took lots of photos and always had an eye out for something interesting.

Since deciding I was finished with marketing and selling my books on RVing and that it was time to move on, my writing has been limited. Besides an occasional contribution to Penwheels and posting things on a website and Facebook for the Arizona Professional Writers, my big project was to write my memoir using StoryWorth. I had lots of RV adventures to share! Plus it gave me perspective on how much the choice to go full-time RVing changed the trajectory of my life.

[Read the rest of Jaimie's profile on [page 18](#).]



Top right image: Teaching a class at a Workamper Rendezvous – 2011

Middle left image: Cover for Support Your RV Lifestyle!

Left image: Quartzsite was a place Penwheelers would meet up and have writing groups. One year Alice Zyetz, Darlene Miller and I (maybe others??) sold our books at the naked man's bookstore! This is me, Darlene and George out at the Boomers parking area in 2011

How and Why I Wrote a Novel (Concluded)

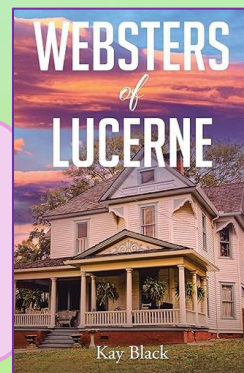
by Kay Black

When diesel prices and our ages increased, we stayed home more. Having a consistent schedule allowed me to participate in a Creative Writing Course. I received valuable feedback on compositions and learned how to exercise my imagination. When our assignment was to submit ten pages with a *Coal* theme, I used personal knowledge of growing up in coal country, created five characters, answered guideline questions, researched coal mining and its effect on the community and environment.

I was complimented but Teacher wanted more detail on the mother character. Ten pages became 20, then 35. I would wake up in the night and think of more ideas to add. More characters came to life, a town was born. I enjoyed time spent with my characters. Each time I declared “done,” more ideas came. Two years later, the novel was read by several friends who encouraged me to publish. My husband agreed.

Websters of Lucerne is a clean read—no sex or violence. I contacted Christian Faith Publishing Co. since I am in my eighties and not savvy enough to figure out how to get the novel printed. They did a super editing job, chose attractive cover art, and produced a 246-page book, bringing tears to my eyes at first sight.

I didn’t know how badly I wanted to have a book published until I held it in my hands. Expensive, but worth it. A sequel has begun.



Editor’s Note: If you missed the announcement of Kay’s book in the Winter issue, here’s the link to it on Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Websters-Lucerne-Kay-Black-ebook/dp/B0BYHQPCDW>

Read the sample. It’s got one of the best first sentences I’ve read in a long time: “With one last gasp for air, Walter shuddered and died.” Whew!

Want to Improve Your Memory? Read a Novel!

In her “Six Memory Boosters” article in the Dec2024/Jan2025 issue of *AARP Magazine*, Leslie Goldman lists “Read a novel” is one of those boosters. Following a plot and keeping track of characters keeps your mind sharp, which is more work for your brain than nonfiction can be, say the experts. (I disagree; doesn’t it depend on what nonfiction you’re reading?) Anyway, here’s a blog post on the same topic, also from AARP: <https://blog.aarp.org/staying-sharp/reading-thinking-skills/>

Wanted: Reader, Writer, Editor

When Margo Armstrong asked if I’d like to edit this newsletter, my motivation for writing fiction was floundering. I was between projects, having finished the third Rollin RV Mystery and at a loss as to how I’d approach the fourth book in the series. The time was right for me to do something else.

Over the years, this newsletter has shifted, sometimes carrying personal essays, other times including more responses to prompts. Sometimes the newsletter ran a few pages, sometimes much longer. It’s been shaped by the editor in some ways, but mostly by you, the Penwheels members, who send in your essays and articles and notes and ideas.

I’ve loved getting to know many of you through our e-mails (and the rare, in-person lunch), and my world is much bigger and better for it. But those ideas I thought I was out of back in 2021 have been piling up, and it’s time for me to dive back in to the writing side of things.

If you would like to have the fun of pulling together this newsletter, [please let me know](#). You will not be in this alone, I promise you!

Preserve Your E-Book Library

Nervous at all about one company having control over your ebooks? If you've been paying attention to the controversy over TikTok, you know a lot of people have invested their livelihoods in a platform which just might vanish, taking their work with them.

Fear not, book lovers and authors! There is a way to hang onto your books without relying on specific readers for the Kindle, Nook, Kobo, or others: Calibre.

The download is free and it's easy to use (well, easier than most). Here's the link:

<https://calibre-ebook.com/>

How do I trust this? Not only have I used this program for many years, but I was reminded about it by an article in *2600 Magazine*. That's a magazine for hackers, who are notoriously suspicious of downloading anything they haven't vetted and don't trust. Plus they love ways to circumvent (legally, regardless of what a few bad apples would have you believe) conventional ways of doing things.

Once you have Calibre loaded onto your laptop (I honestly don't know whether/how it works on tablets or phones), you can read any e-pub file, convert various e-books into and out of various formats... It's way cool.

And if this sounds familiar—yes, Margo Armstrong has mentioned Calibre in the past. This is well worth repeating. If you've got other apps/programs you use for saving, storing, organizing, or maybe reading e-books, please share!

Does Reading Fiction Make You More Empathic?

The debate rages... and you can read about it here:

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190523-does-reading-fiction-make-us-better-people>

Gobsmacked!

Thanks to Jaimie, we can now learn all about how this British word (and many others!) became part of our American English.

A review of *The British Invasion of American English* by Ben Yagoda in the Bookreporter newsletter describes Yagoda's book as "a witty, entertaining and enlightening account of how and why scores of British words and phrases—such as one-off, go missing, curate, early days, kerfuffle, easy peasy and cheeky—have been enthusiastically taken up by Yanks."

If you love language (and you should, you know, being a writer and all...), you can find out more about this book here:

<https://www.amazon.com/Gobsmacked-British-Invasion-American-English-ebook/dp/B0D8XCTFWJ/>

PROMPTING YOU: Summer Prompt Challenge!

- I'm sorry it slipped my mind.
- The look on his face said it all.
- If I could go back in time I would.....

Set your imagination free! Write about something true OR write a little story OR a poem OR whatever occurs to you when you read the prompt. You could even use all three in one piece of writing if you'd like! It's YOURS, after all ☺

The maximum word count is 500 words. Please put a title and your name on the document.

Send your submissions to Carol Ann Quibell at loracvs@gmail.com before May 1. ALL SUBMISSIONS RECEIVE A FREE BOOK BY A FELLOW PENWHEELS MEMBER and publication in this newsletter!

Prompting You!

Penwheels Members Share Their Results



The Abandoned Motorhome (Concluded)

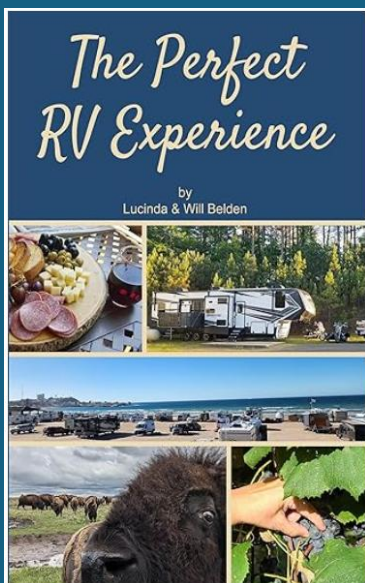
by Jaimie Bruzenak

When parked in the desert, Bill washed the motorhome at any sign of dirt or dust. He had it down to a science and could wash the rig with only one bucket of water. Often other men would give him a bad time.

After eight years of full-timing Bill was lusting after a newer, larger diesel motorhome. At the time, we could buy a house for what that would cost—and we did! We bought a truck and camper and tried to sell the Pace Arrow. However, no one wanted to pay the bluebook value for it or didn't have the cash.

The following year, my writing partner and co-author Alice Zyetz and her husband Chuck had an accident with their truck and 5th wheel. We sold them our motorhome to live in on their lot at Jojoba Hills SKP. When they got their rig back, they in turn sold it to a family who liked to ride in the sand dunes west of Yuma. The dinette that Bill had removed to put in a computer desk was immediately replaced with a used dinette by the new owners!

What ever happened to our Pace Arrow? Is it still on the road or sitting lonely in a farmer's field somewhere? It took us across the country, up to Alaska and back and roamed the West. It led to adventures we never had imagined and created memories I'll never forget. The Escapees slogan is "Home is where you park it," and indeed it was and wherever it is, I'll be ever grateful for that time and those years.



New Book by Penwheels Member!

Lucinda Belden has done it again! She and hubby Will Belden have been full-time RVers since 2019, and between the two of them they have published three books on RVing. Their newest, *The Perfect RV Experience*, provides advice based on their years of RVing, and at well over 500 pages, it covers just about anything you can think of related to RVing—from driving tips to celebrating the holidays on the road. It includes chapters on maintenance, cooking, storage, getting started, making money while traveling, and much, much more.

Congratulations, Lucinda and Will! For more details on this book (with links to info on their other books) go to:

<https://www.amazon.com/Perfect-RV-Experience-Lucinda-Belden-ebook/dp/B0D893M47R/>

2 Months, 20 States and 3 Provinces, 10,000 Miles: My First Road Trip as Retiree – Part 2 (Concluded) *by Sabine Hartmann*

Due to the heat, I knew it would be impossible to sleep in my minivan, so I reserved three nights in Airbnb's in Quebec and New Brunswick. I was looking forward to speaking French again and was more than surprised to find out that I couldn't understand a word when the indigenous talked among themselves. I'm fluent in French but their patois was unintelligible to me. Thankfully, they all reverted to formal French once they figured out that I wasn't a local.

In New Brunswick, and later in Maine, I noticed miles of fences along the dense forests lining the roads and dozens of signs warning of moose. I wanted to see a moose! Not in front of my car though. While driving along, I peeked into every bog, river, and lake but never saw a moose.

When I arrived at my friend's house in Maine, she was still in the Bahamas, having difficulty getting off a private island while also traveling with two cats. We decided to meet in Savannah, Georgia... another unexpected twist of the trip. She finally found a ride and flew to Florida where her car was waiting for her, and I flew from Portland, Maine, to meet her in Savannah. From there, we traveled in her Audi back to Maine.

We stopped at the beautiful estate owned by friends of her in Virginia, visited Jamestown and had the Audi's A/C repaired. Leaving Virginia, I wanted to see the Appalachians. Sadly, when we got there a rainstorm hid the views I was expecting.

"Let's visit Hershey," I suggested, having in mind a quaint town with Hershey Kisses as street lamps. It was a long drive, and when we arrived, we found ourselves in a gigantic parking lot next to the Hershey amusement park. Not being of the social kind, we looked at each other and said, "Let's get out of here!"



Once we made it to Maine and unloaded the felines at her house, my friend and I spent some time exploring the beaches, the lighthouses, marshes, and other views. I even got to see a life-size moose... albeit one made of chocolate.



Soon it was time to head home. I'd been traveling for six weeks already. I chose again to keep north because of the heat, stopping first at the Niagara Falls (it never gets old!) before spending a few days at my friends' places in Toronto and Michigan. From there, I followed "my" US Highway 2 once more, heading due west. In North Dakota, the land opened and I was reminded of just how much I had missed the wide open spaces of the west where you can see for miles, as opposed to the dense forests of the east.

By now, home was like a magnet, I heard its siren call and drove for 18 hours on the last day, just to hug my son (who had held down the fort) and to sleep in my bed. I had left on June 5th and came home on August 5th, a few minutes before midnight.



Born and raised in Switzerland, Sabine Hartmann discovered a love for writing in her thirties. She moved from her German mother tongue to French, then to English. She's been a journalist (in French) and a technical writer (in English). Besides blogging, writing short stories and articles mostly for free, she's written one book in French and has self-published another one in English.



Fiction Tips: The Power of Collaboration (Concluded)

by Marisa Wolf

Logistics – Make it easier on yourselves by having a clear writing process and timeline. Version control can get the best of us individually, never mind when you're swapping a document with a partner. Two major things to determine: the *what* and the *how*. What are you using? Google docs, for instance, will tell you if the other person is in the doc and what they're working on. If you upload word docs to Google drive, Dropbox, One Drive, create a process for labeling your document so you know when the other author has it, which date that version was updated, etc. Then, the *how*: how are you actually writing the story—are you splitting point of view characters? Trading the doc back when you run out of steam? I have it for a week, you have it for a week? Discuss until you find one that works for you both.

Every co-author relationship is going to be different—sometimes even with the same authors on a different project. What matters is that it works for you both—there's so much awesomeness that can emerge from the collaboration!

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 novels are linked on her website (find out more at marisawolf.net) After almost four years of full-timing, Marisa and her husband are temporarily landlocked. We'll see how that goes!



Marisa's New Book!

She's done it again! Our hard-working novelist Marisa Wolf has released (with writing partner Kacey Ezell) a new science fiction novel that sounds fantastic ☺ Here's part of the book's description:

Isonai. Born the bastard daughter of a tyrant king, Isonai took power to save her people from her father's madness and ambition; however, the young queen of Zhretien must now learn to rule a world where truths are complicated, and motives are anything but clear.

Careline. Married to a king to protect her family, she is now relegated to the position of the queen's most hated councilor. With her family's security slipping further and further from her grasp, she must forge a new path to the power and safety she's spent her whole life seeking.

But when palace politics spill over into Isonai's royal heartbreak and result in a severe economic crisis for the people of Zhretien, these two women must find common ground and form an alliance to secure Isonai's right to rule—not only her kingdom, but her thoughts, her choices... and even her very life.

Can two enemies work together, or will they forever be divided by the blood of her father?



Click the image
for more info

Tribute to a Former President by Darlene Miller

President Jimmy Carter died December 29, 2024, at the age of 100 years. I met him in 1996 at a book signing at Barnes and Noble Bookstore in Raleigh, North Carolina. He wrote about his life including teaching Sunday School in Plains, Georgia. The store was crowded with people lining up and down the aisles. This man, who had met thousands of people, including Presidents and officials of foreign governments while President of the United States, said, "All these people came to see me?"

When it was time to get his signature on his book, I told him that I was writing a book. He wished me good luck. This great man was modest and courteous to everyone.

Member Profile: JAIMIE BRUZENAK

As for my Penwheels connection... At our first Escapade, a few months before we began full-timing, I went to the writing BOF. Myrna Courtney was founder and editor but had gotten tired of trying to get submissions. She only published when she had enough to put an issue together. After we hit the road, I volunteered to be editor. Betty Prange did membership and mailing labels. Others helped with the printing and mailing. I was editor for two years. It was a lot of work in the days before cell phones and internet! I wrote to many suggesting they submit something in their genre. And we had challenges with a 100 word limit. I love challenges because you five- and ten-minute pare down your writing to only essential words. It's a great exercise.

Because I can't resist putting in my two cents worth, I have stayed involved as has Joanne Alexakis and a few others. While I am no longer traveling and not doing much writing, Penwheels has been instrumental in making some of my best friends—friends I am still close to and keep in regular contact with. We were fortunate that at the time I was most active, many Penwheelers were also Boomers, so we would have writing groups when we gathered at places like Quartzsite, often in my RV. Those early years most of us boondocked rather than stay in RV parks so if a group of us were parked together, we'd have a writing session based on Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones*. We really got to know others quite well. We would write, then share what we wrote. Those five and ten minute exercises were revealing!

Penwheels has had quite a few editors over the past 30+ years. It is satisfying to see the variety of formats and contributors in that time and to know that Penwheels is still making a difference in the lives of our members.

[We agree, Jaimie! And it's time to turn over the newsletter to yet another editor. If you're interested, please [e-mail Ellen](#)—and know that you will be appreciated by people you don't even know!]

You might think your life has been dull, but we disagree! We love learning about fellow Penwheels members, and we hope you'll consider being profiled. Just [e-mail Ellen](#) and let her do (most of) the rest of the work 😊

Links to Interesting Stuff

Love using a first line to jump-start your writing? There's a publication for that! Yep, "The First Line" posts first lines and accepts submissions based on them. And they **pay real money** if they accept your work. They do have some specific requests about using their first lines, so be sure you read their submission guidelines, where you'll also find upcoming first line prompts:

<http://www.thefirstline.com/submission.htm>

Seemed like a bad idea to me at the time, but they didn't ask me before they phased out teaching cursive in the schools. Now it's coming back to haunt society as a whole. Young people can't read documents written in cursive anymore. So, if you love history, can read cursive, and would like to volunteer in a meaningful way, your skills are needed by the National Archives. More information is here:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/can-you-read-this-cursive-handwriting-the-national-archives-wants-your-help-180985833/>

**It is better to have less
thunder in the mouth
and more lightning in
the hand.**

-- Apache Proverb

*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.*

More Links to Interesting Stuff

Ever notice that some novels seem to have certain things in common? Like a romance novel that starts with people who can't stand each other and you tell yourself, "They'll get together by the end of the book, I just know it," and then you're right? What you've stumbled over is a romance novel trope. What's a trope, exactly? Find out here:

<https://www.writersdigest.com/write-better-fiction/what-are-tropes-in-writing>

Now that you know what a trope is, here's a descriptive list of "21 Popular Romance Tropes for Writers": <https://www.writersdigest.com/write-better-fiction/popular-romance-tropes-for-writers>

Looking for motivation to read? How about a genuine, money-paying contest? *USA Today* is currently running a Winter Book Challenge (and they'll be offering a spring version, if you're reading this late and missed the deadline) which is set up like a bingo card you use to inspire your reading choices.

Curious? I was. Here's the link:

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/books/2025/01/22/winter-book-challenge-submit-prize/77727476007/>

We hear it all the time: write for your target readers. But how do you know who those target readers are?

Jane Friedman explains it all here:

<https://booklife.com/news/create/writing/09/30/2019/no-clear-readership-no-clear-sales.html>

National Library Week

April 6-12, 2025

There's some debate about the first public library in the US—Boston maybe, or perhaps New York. And some churches made their books available to the public. Regardless, they've been an institution in the USA for more than 300 years. That's a lot of candles on a cake!

Tell us about your favorite library!

What makes it your favorite? When did you first go into a library? What did you think? What's the best private library you've been in? Send your thoughts on this to Ellen so she can share them here!

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If You Haven't Submitted Something to the Penwheels Newsletter

2025 IS YOUR YEAR!

Why should you submit something?

Anyone who hasn't submitted something in the last two years (since 2022) will AUTOMATICALLY WIN a prize! Anyone who has submitted in the last two years will be automatically entered into random drawing for a prize, too! Woohoo! You know what they say... More prizes = More chances to win!

How do you submit?

Simple! Just submit something for a 2025 issue. E-mail it (as a Word document if you can; if not, specify what you can send) to Ellen at penwheels@yahoo.com. Put "Win-Win Contest Entry" in the subject line of the e-mail. **Deadline for the Summer 2025 issue is May 15.**

What should you submit?

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) are welcome. Word length: 500-750 words preferred.

Poetry (up to 25 lines) and short stories (up to 1000 words) are also welcome.

Not sure? Go with your gut and send it in!

Check out the Prompt Challenge for inspiration and send your results to CarolAnn at loracvs@gmail.com by **May 1**.

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*. **Chances of getting published in the newsletter: 99% 😊**

What can you win?

Prizes range from Amazon gift e-cards to free books by our members to handmade jewelry. 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

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 and have a copy of the newsletter attached. Newsletters are also available here, with past issues: <https://ellenbooks.com/newsletter-archive/>.

If you're not receiving these e-mails, please send your name and SKP# to Joanne Alexakis (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 (penwheels@yahoo.com) so she can add you to the e-mail distribution list. We do occasionally publish writing by former SKPs, so please don't hesitate to send something!

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

Hope you enjoyed this issue!