



For Escapees Writers... Published or Not

Fall 2025 (Next to the Last Issue??!?!?)

Editor's Note: Still Looking for an Editor!

The countdown is on! I've reached out to various active contributors to the newsletter to see if they would like to become the next editor but all are either so busy with their own writing (yay!) or have other issues (not so yay, as many are related to declining health). Some have served in the past.

So that leaves... you?

If not you, then perhaps it's time to fold up the Penwheels newsletter. Thirty years is a good run, after all. We have other ways of staying in touch than we did all those years ago and maybe social media is sufficient.

I'd keep at it if I could, but I'm in that group of Penwheelers whose own writing is calling to me, and I must answer.

Do know this: there are some active writers and readers who appreciate this newsletter, who don't care if there's a pretty design around the edges, who need to feel in touch with others who share a love of the open road. For some of you, seeing your writing in this newsletter is your way of sharing your experiences, advice, and inspiration.

If carrying on a terrific tradition of editing this newsletter feels tempting, give in to the urge. As editor, you can shape its direction; you might even decide to publish just twice a year. Maybe you'd like to see themed issues, or more photos, or... something different. That's great!

I intentionally formatted this newsletter in a less decorative way, with a more straightforward layout. See? It doesn't have to be fancy because it's the writing that's in here that matters the most. Doesn't have to be a long newsletter. Doesn't have to include photos. You could maybe team up with someone to share the honor! (Ellen can help with that!)

Have I tempted you? Great! Drop me a line at penwheels@yahoo.com and let's get started, or the Winter 2025 issue—sadly—will be our last.



Ellen

Read on for articles from Kay Black and Darlene Miller, plus responses to Carol Ann Quibell's prompts. Take a look at the fantastic Little Free Library photos Jaimie Bruzenak is sharing, and don't miss insights and advice from Marisa Wolf, Margo Armstrong, Joanne Alexakis, and Jaimie.

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Have you ever lost anything from your computer?

by Kay Black

Just recently I opened up my new computer, pressed the on button and NOTHING. My best friend, confidant and publishing pal remained a blank face. “WHY?” I called out in distress.

Some background. Since buying my first computer, a now extinct IBM PC in 1981, I have switched to several different brands, models, laptops. I have gone from true floppies, discs, then thumb drives to save my work. However, I am talking about this new computer - a MacBook Pro, supposed to save my writings to a Cloud. I didn’t know where that cloud was, or how it worked. Therefore, I soon came to realize my work was not saved anywhere other than on my computer which had now failed! My fault for not learning the ropes. On further investigation, my new computer was old enough to go to first grade.

I spent several days kicking myself before reaching out to Mac Tech Support. After an excruciating hour on the phone with someone who sounded like one of my grandsons, he and I both faced the fact that my laptop was comatose. “Can it be resuscitated?” I asked with deep trepidation and fingers crossed.

He made an appointment for me with an in-person Genius who gently took my dear Mac from my strong grip, advising me he would have to be admitted for further tests and exploratory surgery. I would be notified when I could pick him up. And, “No, there are no visiting hours.” I was advised, “we may not be able to save anything currently residing on the internal apparatus.” Eight chapters of my sequel to my published novel and six years of my written words might have vanished. I celebrated my printing out of a lot of my mental meanderings due to my membership in two monthly writing groups. However, with only eight chapters, I was not yet sharing my sequel. No print out. Nothing saved to a thumb drive. Yes, stupid. I know better. But surely this magic Cloud has it? Doesn’t it?

A week later, I was summoned to discharge my computer. Mac, unfortunately, is not covered by Medicare. I tried to smile as I silently chided myself and handed over my credit card to pay what I called “stupid tax”, and said a gracious “thank you”. I carried him gently to the car, secured him safely in the back seat, then placed him on my desk at home. I let him rest for several hours to acclimate to being home before I gingerly opened him, pressed the correct button, and there he was, just like a brand new computer. Gone was my writing program and contacts. Gone was everything he and I had gone through over the past six years. He had total-loss amnesia.

Pricing my former writing program, I decided to use what came with Mac. After several false starts, emails, texts and calls to my friends and family known to help me, we are back in business. I have now added a thumb drive on a hub and, believe me, I will be saving any word documents created on my new/old Mac.

Three rules of writing: save, save, save.



Researching

by Darlene Miller

Have any of you ever had your research done for you? My next book will be about life in the 20th Century. I just received 6 boxes (file size 25 x 40) of memorabilia from the daughter of a cousin who died last year. Included are scrapbooks, photos, letters, immigration papers, naturalization papers, US census papers, newspaper clippings, graduation diplomas, maps, and historical booklets about the areas where they lived. My great-uncle Gerrit worked for the USO during World War II and for the YMCA afterward. (One passport has 25 pages of stamps, and sometimes there are more than one country's stamps on a page.) My great-uncle's thesis on the family from 1935 to 1936 was especially interesting. I remember visiting Gerrit, who was so proud and happy when his son received his PhD in sociology. His son Doward was into genealogy and much of the data belonged to Doward.

I'm reading and rereading and sorting this information. Much of it is redundant and much is about Ruth Gilson Douwsma who married my great-uncle Gerrit Ben Douwsma, but we don't have the same DNA.

Then I thought, "Does it matter?" What I want to write about is life in the 20th century. Now I can use my stories, but other people will have unique, true stories and memories from their own families. Why not ask them to write their story?

I'd love for you to be part of it.

If you're over thirty, you've lived through some of the most rapidly changing decades in history. Do you remember what life was like before smartphones, streaming, and the internet? If you're younger, maybe you've heard your parents or grandparents tell stories that made you wonder how people ever managed without computers, television, or microwaves. These stories made you wonder, "Did people really live like that?"

I'm writing a book that captures those memories—one chapter for each decade. An example is a story in the 1910 to 1920 chapter when Ruth Gilson Douwsma was five years old. She recalled her grandmother curling her hair with a hot poker (carefully, of course), taking long walks to church across the Nokasippi River, and teaching her to wash dishes using stools and basins. When they picked blueberries and canned them, Grandma Mary even put Ruth's name on the jars. These are simple moments, full of heart, told by those who lived them.

That's where you come in. Do you have a memory of the way things were—whether it's a childhood game played in the street, your family's first television set, a wartime letter, a neighborhood tradition, or a hard-earned lesson from a simpler time?

I want to hear your story. Please use 250 words or less and send it to my email address by October 15, 2025. **Your voice matters.** I'll make sure you're credited in the book, and more importantly, your memory will help future generations understand what it was like to live in a world that's quickly fading from view. Please include the decade that the memory took place.

If you're willing to share—or want to know more—let me know. We can preserve the stories that shaped us, one memory at a time. Contact me at: rovingpenna@gmail.com.

Fall Prompts from Carol Ann Quibell

Two writers responded to Carol Ann's Fall issue prompts:

1. My first RV adventure was memorable because.....
2. I wish I could forget the time we.....
3. If only my dreams of....

My First Memory of RV Travel

by Rusty "Zosimus" McFall



As a young lass we lived a life on the move. We moved to Oaxaca, Mexico, when I was 4 years old and my brother was 2. Mom had a small chicken farm. We then moved to Guadalajara where she met my stepfather, married, had children and moved around the city to different locations, eventually landing in Chapala, Mexico. Over the years my grandparents who lived in Canada would make biannual pilgrimage to Mexico to visit us. They traveled in a pickup truck and pulled an Airstream Travel Trailer (TT); my first memory of that iconic image has resonated in me all of my life.

We moved to Chula Vista, California, in the early 70's. After a few years Mom decided that she was going to move out of California and find a new place that she could raise us.

The mode of travel my single mom chose to make this move I would consider unconventional in the 70's—and ground-breaking.

She sold everything we owned; she purchased an old pickup and a truck camper. I have never been able to find a truck camper that was built like it. It had a queen-sized bed on the cab-over with wrap around windows, where most of us preferred to lay while traveling down the road, but also had a queen-sized bed in the back, way before slide-outs where popular. This pop-out had hard sides that unfolded from the mattress, and the bed lifted and unfolded like a Murphy bed. It also had a small dinette that folded down into a small bed, plus bathroom, galley and fridge.

We packed some clothes and off we went. Did I fail to mention that this was now a family of six children ages 16 to 5 and one St. Bernard dog?

One of us would sit up front with Mom. There was enough space that a third person could travel up front on the bench seat. Some of us rode in the cab-over bed, and some of us sat at the dinette. Of course, we

had to stay put once the vehicle was in motion because any movement from one side to the other or up or down would make it difficult for the driver.

We traveled the summer of 1976 to Oregon. We tried to find a place to live there, but the state motto (“Thanks for Visiting”) was palpable. Communities were not open or welcoming to a single, hippy mom with six children and a St. Bernard, so we drove south and then east across the states to Ohio, and finally down to Arkansas where my mom bought a small house in a sleepy town of Damascus, Arkansas, where I finished high school.

I always dreamt of spending my days traveling around the US in an RV. What that RV looked like in my mind’s eye was like that of my grandparents. That dream is still resonating in me today.

If Only My Dreams Of...

by Jaimie Bruzenak



If only my dreams of leisurely, relaxing travels had ever happened. Instead, my two late husbands were always in a hurry to get somewhere. Between the two of them, I RVed through all states except Hawaii. (Bill and I flew there.) However, the majority of the time, we were traveling through states but not really seeing them. In Bill’s case, we were on a mission to get to our jobs or to our winter destination. In George’s case, we’d start early and rush so we could be in a campground by 2 or 3 at the latest. Stop and see the sights? No way! When we did, I could sense their antsy behavior, which made it anything but relaxing. In Bill’s case, if I missed the exit or turn, he’d say he was not going to backtrack. And, he didn’t.

After we hung up the keys, one year George and I traveled back to Maine in our car. The pattern continued. I did pick out unusual stops along the way. One stop, for example, was in Casey IL, the small town with big things. <https://www.bigthingssmalltown.com/> There are 12 World’s Largest plus other large things. We saw several, but when we had to walk past the parking lot to see the other section, George was ready to go. We hadn’t seen all 12. Darn!

Good friends in the Boomers, DeAnna and Al, lived the RV lifestyle I envied. They would often find a boondocking spot in a national forest. It was in driving distance to a town that had a library. Al liked to go exploring to find boondocking spots and Deanna liked to read and watch videos. They took walks with their dog and enjoyed relaxing. They met up with other Boomers who came through their area. All in all, a very relaxing time and no rush to get to the next spot.

Other friends love going to bars or cafes and talking to people, getting to know the locals. They like being regulars, even if for a short time. Now that's going too far for me. I don't care for bars. And, while I might enjoy that sort of thing occasionally at a coffee shop now, I would not have enjoyed it in my RVing days.

My dream would be to travel to an interesting location, spend a few days and leisurely explore the area, moving on when it felt complete. There would be a vague plan and destination, but I'd go with the flow and move when I felt it was time, not on a schedule. I'd live by the Boomer rule, "Our plans are chiseled in Jell-O!"

Winter Prompts from Carol Ann Quibell

Itching to write? Lost for a topic? Try one of these:

1. The eyes said it all—or did I misread them?
2. Today is the day—finally!
3. Taking an unscheduled route brought us

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 before November 1 to Carol Ann Quibell at loracvs@gmail.com.

Little Free Libraries—Pasadena, California, from Jaimie Bruzenak

While visiting my sister we tracked down the boarding school, Pacific Oaks, in Pasadena CA that our mother was sent to. She was only 4 years old! It's no longer a boarding school but still serves children. One had games, the other books.



September is Read a New Book Month!

(But then, who needs an excuse to read, right?)

Which reminds me... if you're eligible for a FREE BOOK written by one of our wonderful Penwheels authors and haven't collected it from Ellen yet, drop her an e-mail about it at penwheels@yahoo.com. She lost a bunch of files, so don't feel shy about reaching out. **All books must be claimed by the end of the year.**

Fiction Tips

by Marisa Wolf



Ok, you finished your (likely messy) first draft. What's next?

Edits! Yay!

Ok, maybe you're not super excited. Edits are a necessary part of writing, and every author has their own approach. The following are suggestions, not requirements – as with any advice, you'll have to find what's best for you. That might change from project to project, and vary based on format. So take these as general guidelines, and as always feel free to email me if you want to talk further.

Let it sit. A little distance from your manuscript will help you see it more clearly. Take a break. Enjoy yourself and rebuild your energy.

Re-read. Try not to make big changes as you're reading through, because your aim is to get a refreshed sense of your story – the pacing, potential plot holes, quality of character arcs, etc. By all means fix typos, but otherwise find a way to mark your thoughts that doesn't leave you rewriting a scene to accomplish something only to find the exact same accomplishment in the next chapter, where it works better. You can leave comments in the word document, keep a running list, jot your notes in one of those beautiful notebooks you've gathered over time...

Self-Edit. Now is the time to make everything in your first draft look like it happened on purpose. Review your notes and make a plan. Punch up those character arcs. Make the climax sing. Read your dialogue out loud and make sure it sounds right. Now that you know the end, make sure the beginning is appropriate for tone, foreshadowing, and starts in the right place. Did you have a key discovery or needed weapon in a later chapter? Make sure it's hinted at or set up effectively early on. Some of your edits might be a single sentence. Others might be scrapping a whole chapter that no longer feels necessary. In a short story, an entire character might have to go because they did nothing but increase your word count. Please don't fully delete anything – have a dumping folder or file where you can keep all the scraps of scenes, beautiful sentences that just don't fit, entire chapters and so on, because you never, never know when you might use them. When you feel good about how everything hangs together, or are so stuck with one particular issue you're not sure how to move forward, go to the next step.

Let someone else read it. Alpha readers are usually people you know well, whose writing advice or sense of storytelling you trust deeply. Set expectations – they should be ready for a slightly rough story, especially if you're stuck somewhere. Flag in a comment where you might be stuck (i.e., I need X character to get to Y place, but this motivation doesn't feel like enough. What do you think?) or tell them before they dive in what you need, and where you'd like their attention. Beta readers are for when you're feeling really good about your story but maybe not ready for it to go public. Some authors have a wide net

here, but I like to keep it small (3-5 folks at most) because otherwise the feedback starts to conflict in a way that makes me lose sight of my own story. One truth to keep in mind: if an alpha/beta reader tells you something in the book doesn't work, they're almost always right. If they tell you how to fix it, they're almost always wrong. It's *your* story, and the result has to feel right to *you*.

Consider and make the changes. You sent the story out for feedback, and have had a little more distance from the manuscript. Make the changes you choose. Double check your dump file/folder to see if anything you took out actually might have to go back in, or reminds you of something else you wanted/needed to do.

Read it again, some more. This is your chance to ensure those changes didn't break something. Read it out loud if you can, or use a program that will read it to you. Your ear will catch oft-repeated words, snags in dialogue, incomplete sentences, and discordant moments (why are they walking into town when they arrived there last chapter?) even better than your eyes.

Turn it in or over. To your publisher, or if you're self-publishing/querying, engage a professional editor to focus where you need (copyedits for typos and sentence structure, developmental edits for plot and story-structure, etc.). At some point you have to let it go – endlessly tweaking and polishing will quickly become a story of diminishing returns, and you didn't work this hard to let it molder on your desk for all time.

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 (marisawolf.net). After almost four years of full-timing, Marisa and her husband are temporarily landlocked. We'll see how that goes!



World of Publishing

by Margo Armstrong

So, what's new at KDP publishing, the Amazon book publishing king of the hill. As of June 20, 2025 the authors take a hit with a reduced royalty rate for print books priced below \$9.99. If your print book sells on Amazon for less than \$9.99, the royalty drops to 50% from the long time rate of 60%. However, an option called A+ Content has been added. This allows authors to add enhanced images, text, and comparison tables to their book detail pages, helping them stand out and engage readers. Amazon authors have been waiting a long time for this bonus.

KDP now allows authors to create and manage book series, including adding books in various formats, for example, ebook, paperback, hardcover, and now audio. The audio version works well with the voice provided by KDP without an extra charge. The author still has to proof it for errors and pacing of course, but I was impressed with the quality. If a customer adds the audio copy to the original sale of ebook or print, add another \$1.99 to the tab.

There are changes to how the Best Seller Rank (BSR) and category ranking are calculated, which may affect how books are perceived and promoted. Good luck figuring out the algorithm on that new configuration. KDP has also updated its keyword rules for book discoverability and search

optimization. You may have noticed that KDP now requires authors to declare if their content (text, images, or translations) is created using AI-based tools, even with substantial edits.

To enhance security and protect against fraud, Amazon is now requiring authors and publishers to verify their identity on KDP.

Margo Armstrong is the author and publisher of over [10](#) books now available on Amazon. Her book “Selling Your Home: How the Real Estate Market Works” is now available in eBook, paperback and now audio format. Contact Margo at margoarmstrong85@gmail.com

More Little Free Libraries

from Jaimie Bruzenak



Barrio Libre in
downtown Tucson,
Arizona

[Editor's Note: If you've
ever been to the desert
Southwest, you
understand offering
water, too 😊]

Do You Know the Longest Word in the English Language?

It's probably not the one you think it is! It's *pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis*
Find out more here: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/medical/pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis>

Don't Forget!

Responses to Carol Ann's prompts (see page 9) are due to Carol Ann by November 1. The maximum word count is 500 words. Please put a title and your name on the document. **Send your submissions to:** loracvs@gmail.com.

All other submissions to the newsletter are due to Ellen at penwheels@yahoo.com by November 15. Please keep length to 500 words or let Ellen know if you need more space 😊 This could be our last newsletter if no one steps forward to edit it, so if you've wanted to send something in, now's the time. [It isn't too late to keep the newsletter going—contact Ellen for info!]

Hope You Enjoyed This Issue of the Penwheels Newsletter!