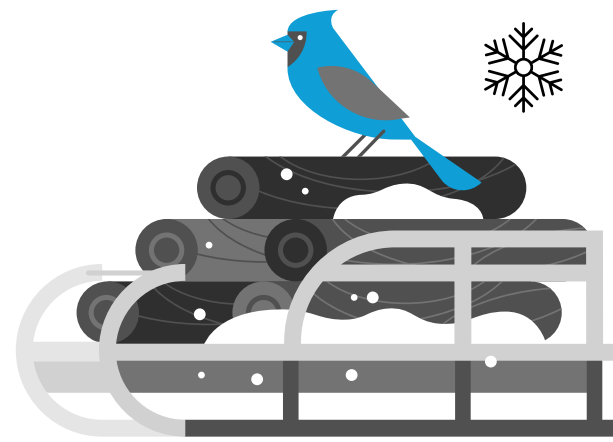




For Escapees Writers...
Published or Not



Introducing Our New Penwheels Group Administrator! Please Welcome Lorraine Haataia , PhD



A lifelong writer and passionate writing-community builder, Lorraine is the bestselling author of *Finish Your Book: Plug into the Power of a Writing Community and Get It Done*. She is the founder of Prolific Writers Life, an online writing community dedicated to helping writers finish and publish their books.

Lorraine is a former English and ESL professor, and later used her writing expertise in corporate training roles focused on continuous improvement and marketing. She and her husband Bob live in Casa Grande, Arizona (between Phoenix and Tucson). They enjoy West-Coast adventures in their Leisure Travel Van Unity Rear Lounge, chasing beautiful writing spots and visiting family and friends in Idaho, Washington, Oregon, California, Utah, and Nevada — with the occasional cross-country trip to Florida, also to see family and friends.

Lorraine is always happy to talk craft, attend book festivals, and connect with fellow writers. She looks forward to meeting Penwheels members in person along their road trips and at writers' conferences and book events along the way.

Reach out any time on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/doctorlorraine/> Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/DoctorLorraine> or visit her community at <https://prolificwriters.life>

We're thrilled to have Penwheels remain an Escapees Birds of a Feather Group! The future of this newsletter is still in transition, so watch for more details. If you'd like to volunteer in some way, please contact Lorraine.

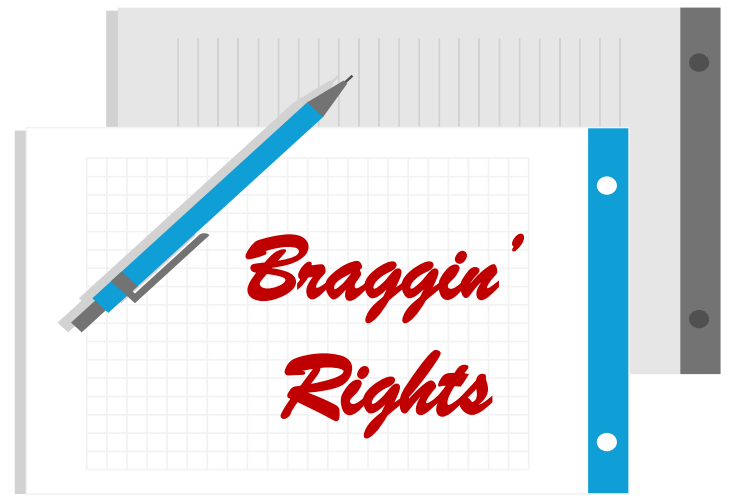


Contributed by Jaimie Bruzenak

This account in *Writers Weekly* 8/29/25 illustrates how scams can suck someone into spending thousands of dollars to get their book published. They target the older population. "EXTREME WARNINGS about Times Book Publishing / TimesBookPublishing.com, World Publishing and Co, AND Ink Shelf Studios / InkShelfStudios.com":

<https://writersweekly.com/angela-desk/extreme-warnings-times-book-publishing-world-publishing-co-ink-shelf-studios>

This story of losing money to scam publishers is even worse! This woman lost \$40,000. Read "WARNING from \$40,000 Elderly Victim of The Book Professionals / TheBookProfessionals.com" in *Writers Weekly* 9/13/25: <https://writersweekly.com/ask-the-expert/warning-from-40k-victim-of-the-book-professionals-thebookprofessionals-com-scam>



Contributed by Joanne Alexakis

No Penwheels members' bylines were spotted in the Nov/Dec 2025 issue of the *Escapees* magazine.

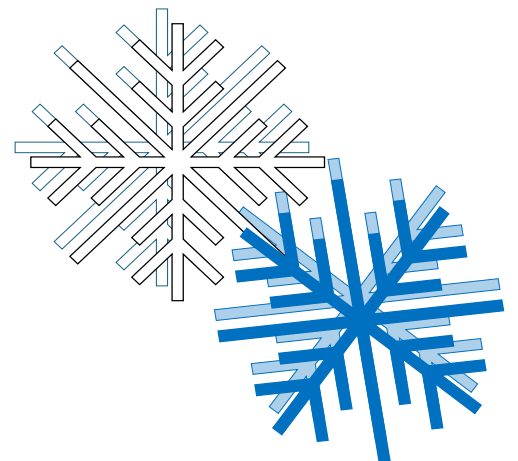


Party on Plomosa!

Wendy Stanwood, our Escapees BoF/Chapter Director, reminds us of the annual Party on Plomosa happening in Quartzsite **on January 21st, 2026**, from 12:30 to 4:00 Arizona time.

Wendy invites us to an afternoon of food and fun. There will be live music by Status Crowes and tables with information on Escapee BoFs, Chapters, and SKP Co-Ops. "Bring a chair and your favorite beverage and come join us, approximately 3 miles out on Plomosa Rd. You'll see the big Escapees trailer and signs. Everyone is welcome, both members and non-members."

[Thanks for the heads-up, Joanne!]



Little Free Libraries

Contributed by Jaimie Bruzenak



← The Lincolnville, Maine, local library sponsors a LFL and even lets us know when Bess the Book Bus will be in visiting.

And how handy is this? A Little Free BAG LIBRARY! Maybe we should all steal this idea from the Bayside Market in Coronado, California. →

Speaking of handy, here's a portable, movable feast of free books!



Types of Scams

With millions (billions?!?!?) of shoppers spending billions (at least!) of dollars through their Website, Amazon stands to lose a lot through scammers. To help us all avoid getting taken, they've devoted a chunk of their site to describing scams and providing ways to report them.

Here's just one page on the different types of scams out there (check out the left menu options for many more related topics):

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=TapjnwRvIRtIgyLPSI>

Don't get taken!

[Margo Armstrong delivers another great resource for identifying scams in her World of Publishing column on [page 5](#). And your ever-cautious editor got an e-mail that sounded suspicious... See [page 12](#) to read what happened and see how Angela Hoy responded!]

Member Profile: Marisa Wolf

Penwheels has been very fortunate to have had in its midst some very accomplished authors—Marisa Wolf among them! She's been sharing her Fiction Tips with us for awhile, and before that she introduced us to each other through these Member Profiles. If you haven't discovered Marisa's amazing novels, you need to visit her website and/or browse her books on Amazon. I'm not a sci-fi nor fantasy reader, but have read hers and enjoyed them a lot. Here's our e-mail interview, in full.



Marisa and hubby Jeremy in Hawaii

Give us a little background... and do include something we won't find on your Amazon profile ☺

I've been obsessed with sci-fi since I was a kid (my dad had me watching Star Trek with him before I could hold my own head up), and I had three modes as a kid: 1) talking people's ears off, 2) nose buried in a book, 3) making up stories and illustrating them terribly. Anything else I had to do I attempted to pair with one of those - please picture a pre-teen attempting to read the book in her hand while (badly) vacuuming with the other. The internet came in the mail when I was in middle school, and I discovered the world of fanfiction. One of my awesome co-authors there ultimately helped me get published for real, with my own stories, and I haven't slowed down since. My most random fact is in my bio (that I was headbutted by an alligator), but an additional one is my husband and I decided to fulltime RV kind of on a whim. He really wanted to eventually get an RV, and we'd talked about it off and on, then we both got laid off in 2020. We sold our house, bought my brother-in-law's RV, and hit the road for a middle-aged-gap-year that turned into...more years.

Do you still have the original "Sarah and the Idaho Potatoes" story you wrote when you were a wee child? If not, do you know where it is?

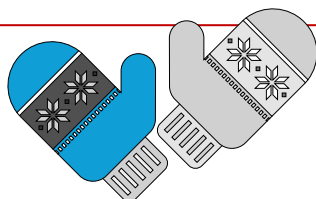
It may still exist in storage, but I do at least have a picture of the cover, in all its laminated (and terribly illustrated) glory!



What inspired you to travel? Where's the best place you've been and why? Where's the worst place you've been and why?

Seeing new places has always been a joy of mine. My favorite place in the RV was James Island, SC. Not only was it a super fun workamping experience, but it was so, so beautiful, I went to the beach on a regular basis, found a ton of cool fossils, and the food in the Charleston area...whew. Best non-RV place was Costa Rica. Or maybe Barcelona. Also beauty-and-food related, though sadly less fossils. 😊 I don't know that there's been a worst, really - there's been something lovely about everywhere I've been. Like when we went to the Okefenokee Swamp, we turned down a wrong, unpaved, too narrow road and had to be real lucky to turn around, then it poured the whole time we were there so we didn't see anything...but the people we met were so incredibly nice and campground was lovely, so it was a wash (pun intended).

[Read more of our interview on page 6, and don't miss Marisa's Fiction Tips on page 10!]



Most writers are aware of the Authors Guild as being a reliable resource to stay up-to-date on the latest publishing scams. 2025 is no exception. Feel free to check their website at authorsguild.org before you decide to accept the latest offer from any publishing company. This is their latest list of scams from September 2025.



Remember: Legitimate publishers don't require large upfront fees from authors. This and promises of premium bookstore placement for an additional cost are major red flags.

Harper Book Writers

September 16, 2025: Be on the lookout for Harper Book Writers, an internationally-based ghostwriting scam that specifically targets first-time authors seeking self-publication services. They consistently fail to deliver promised services while demanding thousands in additional upcharges.

Update on PageTurner Press

July 18, 2025: Bloomberg Businessweek published a [deep dive into PageTurner Press](#), which we [warned about back in 2023](#) then reported on again when [three individuals behind the scam were arrested and charged](#) in January 2025.

Leavitt Peak Press

March 21, 2025: Watch out for unsolicited emails from so-called book publishers such as “Leavitt Peak Press” who claim to have “discovered your old book” and want to republish it at a lower price with “100% royalties for life.” They typically target authors of older books, promising to revitalize sales through republishing.

Update on “Authors Guild Literary”

March 6, 2025: Authors Guild [warned authors](#) about scammers posing as the “Authors Guild Book Acquisition Team” at “Authors Guild Literary.” This fraudulent domain used in the scam, authorsguildliterary.com, now legally belongs to Authors Guild and is safe to use.

Podcast Ploy Seeks to Take Advantage of Authors

February 1, 2025: A new email scam targeting authors with fake offers for paid podcast interviews. When considering this kind of scam, authors should be alert and pay attention to some potential cues, which often signal that an untoward opportunity is around the corner: Names that you cannot match with real staff or employees; requests that you send money for a service or that you will receive money for services that generally are unpaid; fictitious-looking email addresses that use generic domain indicators rather than company domains; typos and badly written communications.

Unsolicited Publishing Offers

January 23, 2025: Be on the lookout for phone scams targeting self-published authors with unrealistic offers. The scammers often pose as representatives of legitimate organizations such as the Authors Guild and offer suspiciously large publishing deals from major publishers for previously self-published books.

[See more warnings from the Writers Guild in Margo's conclusion on page 8]



Member Profile: Marisa Wolf... continued

I just finished "Plague of Magic" and loved it! How do you entice hubby to give you the solitary time you need to write, or have you found a magical (see what I did there??!) way to write while watching TV or something equally cool?

hahahha, oh I wish I had a magic answer!! My husband has to get up super early for work, so during the week I usually stay up late to write (and write as much during the day as I can). Then I leave weekends for us to hang out, but am back at it on Sunday nights. And then, close to a deadline, sometimes weekends are off the table too, but I try to make it up to him once the book is turned in!

Why did Penwheels appeal to you as a Birds of a Feather Escapee group?

Writing and RVing?? Two of my favorite things! I was so excited to find a group of people passionate about some of the same things I am. And of course, Ellen is a delight who made it welcoming and wonderful!

You've had wonderful success in your writing--congrats! What most supports your creativity and imagination? Why?

Thank you! It's a mix - travel for sure. A recent trip to the Badlands helped resolve an entire chunk of the sequel to A Plague of Magic in my head, and super motivated me to get back to that world. Also, sometimes spite. If I watch a movie or tv show that completely fumbles a promising concept, or an awesome character, etc, it will often worm into the back of my head until I find the right story to do it the way I would have liked it to go.

Your female protagonists are strong and smart and just enough like most of us to resonate. Is there a secret behind creating such memorable characters?

Oh my goodness, you are so kind. I'm a very character driven writer - I usually have my protagonist's voice in my head before I have any idea what her world or story is even going to be. Some characters take a while to come together though, so I'll sketch out completely random little vignettes that will never go in a story, but help me figure out their personality, the way they speak, what's underneath their motivations/actions, etc. Also...usually by the end of my first draft all the characters have come fully into focus, so more often than not I end up tweaking (or entirely rewriting) the beginning of the story to match where everyone got to in the end.

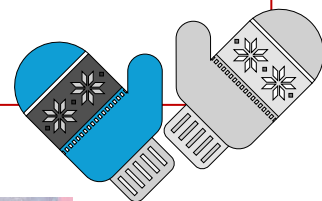
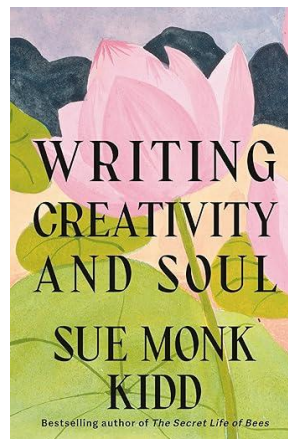
[Read the conclusion of our interview on the next page!]

Writing Inspiration and Guidance

Book Recommendation from Jaimie Bruzenak

From the bestselling author of *The Secret Life of Bees* and *The Book of Longings* by Sue Monk Kidd: an intimate work on the mysteries, frustrations, and triumphs of being a writer, and an instructive guide to awakening the soul.

For more info and to download a free sample, go to: <https://www.amazon.com/Writing-Creativity-Soul-Monk-Kidd-ebook/dp/B0DTN69RXQ/>



Member Profile: Marisa Wolf... concluded

You juggle several projects (or so it seems) at one time. How do you manage to keep things straight, keep things moving forward, make time for the conferences you attend, and devote the time you need to yourself and loved ones?

Please picture a mixture of my laughing and crying at the same time here. With different projects I've found ways to balance - I'm not first-drafting multiple things at once, but I might have a novel in edits while I work on a short story, or be reviewing a second draft while outlining something else. Sometimes I have a playlist of music for the different moods of the different projects, but either way I'm not usually good at working on too many things in one day, so it's like a dedicated Mon-Wed on one thing, and the other for the rest of the week. Mostly I am hugely deadline driven, so it's a balance of what's due & how much time I have until then. The conventions and conferences are usually dedicated no-writing time (unless I have a deadline and stay up to all ridiculous hours to both see people at the con aaaand get my story done in my hotel room). Time for myself and loved ones usually comes from spontaneous adventure days (usually when I need to play hooky from writing) or on the weekends. The short answer is probably something like - I delay until I have to get work done, work frantically while ignoring the world, pass it in, gallivant for a while...and the cycle repeats. But sometimes I'm more responsible than that?



What's next for you? If there's a book on the horizon, when and how can we get our hands on it?

Next I get to dig in and work with a grandmaster of science fiction, David Weber, so I'll be working on some novels and short stories with him/in two of his established universes. The novel is in the Honor Harrington series, which is a character/set of books I fell madly in love with starting in high school, so my nerdy little heart is constantly trying to beat right out of my chest. There will be all sorts of short stories and other adventures along the way, so folks can join my newsletter (only one a month!) from my website (www.marisawolf.com) or follow me on amazon/facebook/instagram to hear about each thing early!

Is there anything I didn't ask you'd like to add?

I don't think so. You rock!! ❤️ ❤️

[You do, too, Marisa!!! Thanks so much!]

[Don't miss Marisa's Fiction Tips on page 10]

Gift Ideas for Writers and Readers

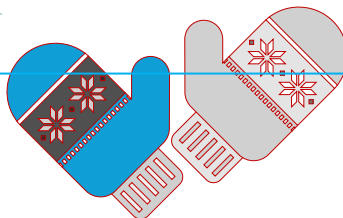
Yep, you can find anything on Amazon. Here are just two of many throws for readers:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0DP421VRS/> AND <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0DTHN94WL/>

Sometimes it's easier to get motivated to do something when some of the work is done for you. These forms for book reviews might just get you to jot down what impressed you (or left you cold) from what you read: <https://www.amazon.com/L1rabe-Review-Notepad-Journals-Tracking/dp/B0DJNLKG6R/>

Sticky notes? Got that covered, too: <https://www.amazon.com/Gilprop-Bookworm-Trackers-Accessories-Librarian/dp/B0DKXT22B7/>

[More Gift Ideas on page 11]



Next Phaze Media Group

January 9, 2025: Beware of “agents” who charge upfront fees to represent your books for potential movie deals. This scammer follows a common pattern: charging an upfront fee, signing a one-year contract, then becoming unresponsive and doing no actual work to market the books to film producers.

Leap Write Literary

December 20, 2024: Beware of aggressive “independent publishers” like Leap Write Literary, who persistently call until authors agree to republish their books then orchestrate elaborate multi-stage scams. Remember: Legitimate publishers never charge authors for documents or services, and movie producers don’t cold-email authors about film rights.

Brokers AB

December 6, 2024: Beware of elaborate schemes like the one run by “Brokers AB” where scammers like “Brittany Jones” offer free literary representation and promises of large publishing deals. The scam then pivots to requiring increasingly large upfront fees, starting with substantial amounts (like \$5,000) supposedly for distribution through legitimate companies like Ingram Spark, followed by a series of smaller “required” payments. Some authors still fall victim due to the professional presentation and gradual nature of the financial requests.

Scammers Impersonating Hachette Book Group

October 15, 2024: Since our warning on October 20, 2023, authors continue to report being targeted by a scam impersonating Hachette Book Group. The scammers send authors unsolicited emails claiming to have discovered their work on Amazon and offering a “unique opportunity for traditional publishing.”



Margo Armstrong is the author and publisher of over [10](#) books now available on Amazon. Her book “About Men: Myths Revealed” is now available in eBook, paperback and audio format.

Links to Hopefully Interesting and Maybe Helpful Stuff!

Looking for a book fair near you? Whether you're hoping to sell your wares, meet other authors, or find a great read, Writer's Digest has the list for you: book fairs in all fifty states. Here's the link:

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

How do you spot a book publishing/marketing scam? Gene Helfman offers some great specifics in his article for BookLife: <https://booklife.com/authors/08/18/2025/avoiding-publiphishing-scams.html>

Love your notebooks? I thought I had a true obsession with buying blank journals and notebooks, then putting off writing in them because they're too pretty.... and then I stumbled across Notebook Stories and discovered what true notebook obsession is: www.notebookstories.com

Great reviews if you're thinking of jotting things down on paper and yearn for a wonderful notebook for it!

[You'll find more maybe helpful links on page XX]

Why You Should Read "Misery" by Lorraine Haataia, PhD

When most people think of getting writing advice from Stephen King, they immediately think of his book *On Writing*. But here's another one you need to consider: *Misery*.

Horror isn't my genre. I don't do blood, gore, or torture. But *Misery* kept me so hooked that when I reached the final pages, I actually slowed down because I didn't want it to end.

Here's why every writer should read this book: it's the ultimate cure for writer's block.

Paul Sheldon, a successful novelist, gets trapped by his "number one fan" Annie Wilkes after a car accident. What follows is physical and mental torture as she forces him to write a new novel bringing back a character he'd already killed off. Throughout the book, Paul is in constant pain, drugged up, and literally held prisoner. And yet—he writes.

Before the accident, Paul couldn't write if he had a headache. The smallest thing would stop him. But under Annie's "care," with his life on the line, he discovers tremendous strength to keep going. His guest room becomes his hospital room, torture chamber, and writing parlor all in one.

King masterfully weaves Paul's story with chapters from the book he's writing, keeping us wondering: Can he survive? Can he write his way out of this nightmare?

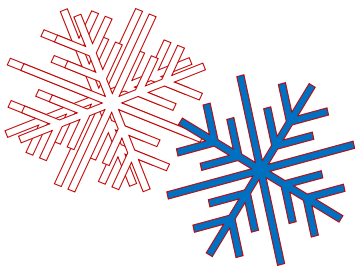
The irony? Annie Wilkes represents King's own struggle with drug addiction—something he couldn't escape even though it was destroying him.

So next time you're facing writer's block, remember Paul Sheldon. Whatever circumstances you're dealing with probably aren't as bad as writing while being held captive by a serial killer.

If he could finish his book under those conditions, you can finish yours.



Dr. Lorraine Haataia is the founder of [Prolific Writers Life](#), the bestselling author of [Finish Your Book](#), and not only one of our newest members, but our new group administrator. Welcome to Penwheels!



Viva La Cliché!

We writers know better than to rely on clichés, to scrub our sentences clean of them till every paragraph sparkles. But Catherine Shannon offers "A brief defense of cliché" that's worth reading, here at The Substack Post:

<https://post.substack.com/p/a-brief-defense-of-cliche>

Viva La Scripturients!

Scripturient (noun): having a desire or passion for writing

Whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, a writing community can make all the difference to your longevity in the field – and even the quality of your work.

“Writing is a lonely profession” is a common phrase, but it doesn't have to be true. I got my start in collaborative fanfiction, and then began my published career writing with one of my best friends, so it literally was never lonely for me. But even now, when it's more often than not just me and my brain and the screen, loneliness isn't ever my issue.

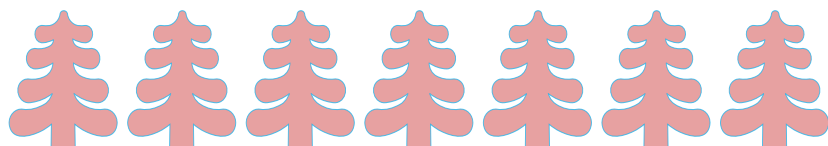
Do you want to further build your writing community? Step one is deciding what you, personally, need – not just what some other person on the internet told you to look for. Do you need encouragement? Helpful criticism? Development and ongoing improvement? Connections?

Spoiler: all of those are helpful. But they might not all be your main priority. Below are some common avenues of opportunities for authors, and what you might use them for. All of these categories have options that range wildly in quality, size, price, and helpfulness, and I strongly recommend vetting anything before you invest time and or money in them.

Writing seminars: Check out reviews from attendees (not just on the seminar's website – do a general internet search for the seminar), and weigh what they're offering, the cost, what you're looking for, and what you can afford to invest. Do they specialize in your chosen genre(s)? Do their speakers/instructors have solid reputations? Do their stated goals or promised outcomes match what you're looking for? See if they offer scholarships or volunteer opportunities – the latter might split your focus a bit, which is its own cost, but also can be a great way to meet folks. For example, I've attended the Superstars Writing Seminar (<https://www.superstarswriting.com/>). My first time there I ended up volunteering at the registration table, which allowed me to meet a lot of people and eased me into it because I had a place to “be.” Throughout that whole seminar, I learned a ton, met incredible folks, and decided to go back a second year. Ultimately I joined their staff both because I believe in the community and development offered – and because I couldn't afford to go every year otherwise. They offer a number of scholarships as well, to writers of all ages and experience levels. While I haven't attended Saga (<https://sagaconference.com/about/>), I know the people who run it and they have excellent reputations in author circles. Depending on who I'm talking to and where they are in their careers, I've suggested both attending and not attending. I'm always happy to talk to Penwheelers, if you want to reach out and talk about seminars more!

Conventions: There are all kinds of events for different genres – many are fan run, some are corporate-driven, and others might be run by a specific publishing house or nonprofit. The beauty of being RVer – events all over the country might be open to you! Search for things like “thriller fan events,” “scifi fan convention,” “mystery writers fan convention,” etc. I've found conventions to be an incredible place to meet people who love the same things I do, are passionate about similar things, and they can become a wonderful group of writer friends, or early readers, or cheerleaders of your work. Many conventions also have writer tracks for no additional cost, where you can learn from other professionals in your field and meet other writers in the audience.

[Marisa shares more ways to connect on the next page]



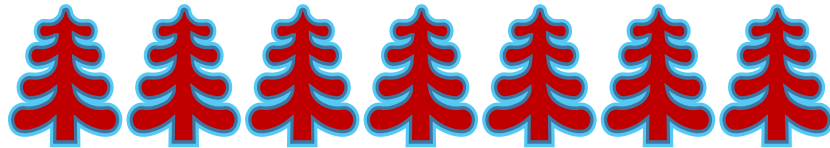
Fiction Tips: You're Not in It Alone (concluded)

by Marisa Wolf

Internet groups: Groups about writing and for writers exist all over the internet – on Facebook, Discord, etc. Penwheels is a great one (obviously!). If you're looking for additional groups, remember that 1) it shouldn't cost you anything and 2) you can observe the group for a bit before getting active to see if it's going to be a great fit for you. Another option is to watch the videos or organized fan groups of authors you admire, and see if you want to join the community around them. Some authors, like Sarra Cannon (<https://www.youtube.com/sarracannon>) have youtube pages where they share tips, their experiences, and where connections can be built across comment sections and forums.

Writing groups: If you're considering starting or joining a writing group, this is where I stress knowing what you need, want, and are looking for. Some writing groups are critique heavy, and not everyone is equally experienced at giving/receiving criticism. Some might meet up for shared writing time, but not look at each other's work. Others might be focused more on querying (prepping to secure an agent or publishing contract). Everyone you meet might not be a long-term friend, and some people might never "connect" with you. Still, every like-minded person you meet is another part of making writing more enjoyable, longer lasting, and potentially more profitable. No loneliness needed here!

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! [If you missed the member profile on Marisa, go back to page 4!]



More Gift Ideas!

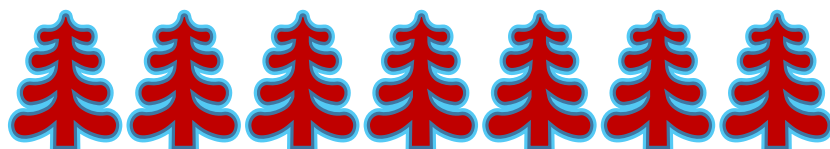
The last thing I need is another tote. But this one? Might go on my Amazon shopping list:
<https://www.amazon.com/ENSIANTH-Writer-Revise-Appreciation-Writing/dp/B0CBJVTVH/>

The next to the last thing I need is another bag. But this one? Hmmm:
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0DTHZL8HW/>

Another mug? Well, you can never have too many of those: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0DR7PR3VN>

But I didn't have one of these, so I bought one: A tee shirt reading "Read books. Drink coffee. Fight evil."
Wonder if we all wore this tee shirt anything in the world would change?
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B078NLVWY4>

I have enough earrings to open a store, but this pair of bookish, teardrop earrings is mighty tempting:
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0FBWZ9J28>





More Helpful (Hopefully!) Links

Want to lose yourself in a movie about a writer? Here's a list of movies to choose from:

<https://www.writerswrite.com/journal/movies-writers/>

And don't miss reading Lorraine's reasons why we should all read Stephen King's *Misery*, which inspired a terrifying movie—see page XX!

Don't you LOVE seeing how other writers pull together a book?

Especially a famous book? Here's a great article on Mary Shelley's notes for "Frankenstein" (and some juicy gossip about the soap opera-worthy circle of fellow writers she ran with):

<https://jillianhess.substack.com/p/re-noted-mary-shelleys-notes-for>

Sounded Like a Scam to Me

by Ellen Behrens

The e-mail looked personal. It included references to my book that—it seemed—only someone who could have read it would know. The sender lavished me with praise. They wanted to share my book with their book club and its oodles of members. This wasn't the usual come-on. Or was it?

The e-mail said, in part: "We hunt for books like yours, read them with care, and leave honest reviews....So here's my no-pressure invitation: let us take Pea Body for a spin. We'll bring the kind of attention and reviews that help it cut through the noise and find the readers who need exactly this mix of mystery, humor, and humanity."

I sent a reply. I didn't say yes, but admitted I was skeptic and wanted to know how to verify his group. I got a very reassuring response: there's no cost and no catch.

Now the red flags really went up. If there's no cost, why not just tell all his readers about my book and let them decide whether to read it or not and leave a review if they want to? But I didn't ask him that.

Instead, I asked Angela Hoy at Writers Weekly/BookLocker. If she sounds familiar, it's because we quote her often in this newsletter. Her website says, "If you suspect you're talking to a scammer, [CONTACT ANGELA](#). She'll know!"

Angela responded quickly, sharing with me her own interaction with someone like this: "I engaged with someone pitching the same thing. After I sent her some hard questions, she finally admitted that authors are required to 'tip' each reviewer \$20. And, of course, the book copies had to be free... Definitely a scam."

Sometimes they require printed copies of the books which, Angela says, are likely sold on Amazon as a third-party vendor. You just provided them with a cost-free product, so they've made all kinds of money from this "no cost, no catch" arrangement.

I've since received another e-mail and noticed the same thing Angela has: they both came from gmail accounts. Angela has written about this and similar kinds of scams, but here's one link to get you started: <https://writersweekly.com/ask-the-expert/book-club-scam-targeting-authors>

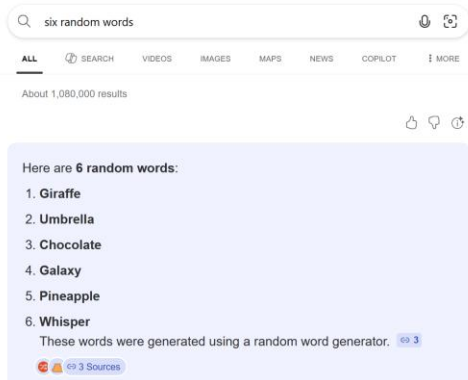
Beware! Scammers lurk in many inboxes!!

Prompting You: Six Random Words

Carol Ann Quibell didn't receive any responses to the prompts she posted in the Fall newsletter... ☹

And we're not posting new prompts for the next issue since we're not sure when (or if) the next newsletter will come out.

So, here's at least one way to create your own prompts. A popular method we used in the Jojoba Hills Writing Group (thanks to the late great Alice Zyetz) was a variation of "Six Words."* Doesn't really have to be six but if you type "six random words" into the Bing search bar, you'll get something like this:



For those of us who are hard of seeing, here's the list:

- Giraffe
- Umbrella
- Chocolate
- Galaxy
- Pineapple
- Whisper

I tried this with Yahoo and AOL and got search results showing where to access random word generators... so try that if you prefer. Me? I like the instant gratification of a list, but there might be a flaw in the Bing option: when I tried it again, I got the same six words....

So experiment... give the generators a try. In any case, you're likely to land on something that will deliver you random words to use in a story or poem :) Have fun!

*PS: In the JJH writing group, we each wrote down a word, not telling anyone what that word was until everyone had thought of something. Then everyone shared their word with the group and we had to write something incorporating every word. An extra challenge was to use each word in the order they were given. It was fun and made for some creative stories and poems.

Alternative ways to generate words:

- Decide how many words you want; open the dictionary anywhere and pointing randomly to an entry on the page until you have the number of words you decided on.
- Do the same as with the dictionary, but with magazines or newspapers—even a catalogue or two might be fun.
- Do the same except using a novel or other book.
- Ask someone to give you a name, then ask someone else for a place, and a third person for a situation, then write something that uses all three in an unexpected way (for an example, see "Bird Sanctuary" by Charlie Parker on the next page).

Get the idea? Words are everywhere! You've found them... now use them ☺



[Character, place & situation—A young boy, bird sanctuary, batteries ran out]

Even though it was a bird sanctuary the young boy knew in his heart and mind that there would be bats at night. But, he was well prepared, his flashlight had new batteries and he was ready to shine that little beam of light right into the bat's eyes. He had heard the phrase "blind as a bat"—well Johnny planned to blind those bats.

His dad had told him that if he went to the bird sanctuary at night he would be able to see owls and other nocturnal birds.

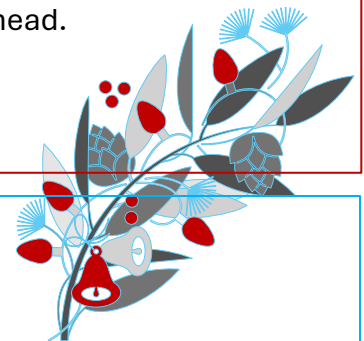
Johnny sat against the base of the large eucalyptus tree and waited. The dark began to fill the night as the sun sank below the horizon. He turned on the flashlight just to check it out. The bright beam of light he had expected glowed only a dim yellow. It appeared the batteries had begun to run out.

It was then that he heard the swooshing noise that is so distinctive of an owl's wing flap—it startled him—but he had expected that sound. He tried the flashlight again—this time nothing. He had hoped to feed the owl some of the wild mice he had caught. Without the light he would not be able to illuminate the mice for the owl.

It was his first night in the dark by himself—how was he supposed to know the owl did not need him to shine the flashlight on the mice?

He held one of the mice by its tail, extending his arm to its full length. The owl swooped down and grabbed the mouse. Johnny jumped up, startled. It was then that he felt the bat land on his head.

His scream could be heard all the way back to the farm house.



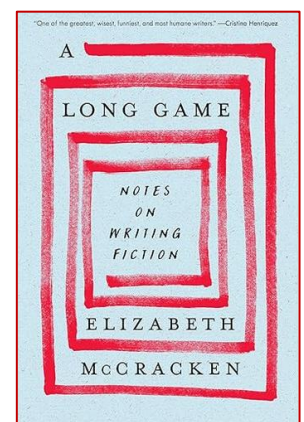
More Inspiration

from Jaimie Bruzenak

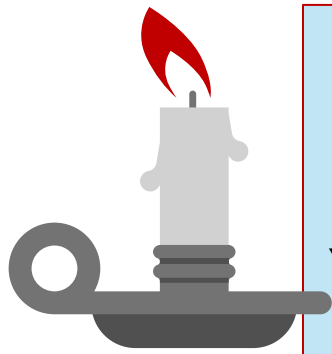
Goodreads rating 4.25 out of 5

A LONG GAME: Notes on Writing Fiction by Elizabeth McCracken
(Language Arts/Self-Help)

Writing can feel like an endless series of decisions. How does one face the blank page? Move a character around a room? Deal with time? Undertake revision? The good and bad news is that in fiction writing, there are no definitive answers to such questions: writers must come up with their own. Elizabeth McCracken has been teaching for more than 35 years, guiding her many students through their own answers. In *A LONG GAME*, she shares insights gleaned along the way, offering practical tips and incisive thoughts about her own work as an artist. Writing "is a long game," she notes. "What matters is that you learn to get work done in the way that is possible for you, through consistency or panic. Through self-recrimination or self-delusion or self-forgiveness: every life needs all three."

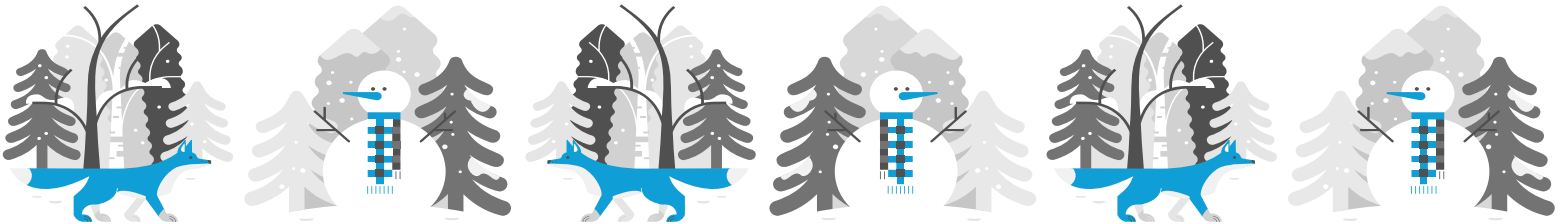


You can find it on Amazon here: <https://www.amazon.com/Long-Game-Notes-Writing-Fiction-ebook/dp/B0DZ2VXXMQ/>



*Congratulations,
Janna Roznos!*

You've won a \$10 gift certificate from Amazon in
the 2025 random drawing!



Note from the Editor

Four years ago, after penning the Fiction Tips column for nearly seven years, I shifted into the editor's seat for this newsletter, not quite knowing what to expect but eager to help other Penwheels writers find inspiration and motivation for their own work. Along the way, I've met—primarily online—many wonderful people.

I'll forever be grateful for this experience. I learned this lesson long ago when I was fiction editor for an international literary magazine: you learn as much (maybe more) from editing as you do from sitting at the keyboard, churning out your own work.

To anyone I've offended or upset during my turn as editor, I apologize. Sometimes even editors have bad days. To anyone who has been inspired or motivated by something included in these pages, I credit the contributors.

It's time for me to turn my attention to my own writing again, so as much as I have loved pulling together this quarterly collection of essays, poems, reflections, hints and links, it's time to hand it over. Each new editor brings his or her own vision of what this newsletter can be, but I trust it will continue to draw primarily on the writing you, the Penwheels members, contribute.

This is, after all, YOUR newsletter ☺

To the next editor, whoever you might be, I wish you all the best!

*SKP Hugs,
Ellen*

