



Penwheels Newsletter

Summer Issue 2021

For Escapees Writers, Published or Not

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Note: Short issue this quarter due to lack of participation by our members.

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Penwheels is a private group of Escapees members who enjoy writing and discussing the writing adventure.

The Penwheels Newsletter is digitally published quarterly.

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Jaimie's Tips

Do you write short stories? Here are 6 paying markets. Check them out in the 4/23/21 issue of [Writers Weekly](#) online magazine.

Now here's a thought! A different way to sell fiction stories in the Writer's Weekly 3/12/21 issue. "[Four paying fiction podcast markets for writers.](#)"



Braggin' Rights

Joanne Alexakis

In the Mar/Apr 2021 issue of the Escapees magazine, Ellen **Behrens SKP#103358** is featured in the *From the Bookshelf* column.

Ellen's books, *Superstition Victim*, *Pea Body*, and *Yuma Baby* all feature our heroes, RVers Walt & Betty Rollin. Living normal RVing lives, running into surprising situations, investigating intriguing details, and using common sense, the detectives work to solve a few murders.

Ellen is one of our Penwheels newsletter contributors and supplies many interesting facts for writing a fine article. Her fiction stories are mighty fabulous, too!

Writer's Challenge Response

Interesting Workamper Positions

By Jaimie Bruzenak SKP#19361

Hard to choose. Driving a boat around Lake Powell to pick up trash? Spotting wildlife in the Grand Tetons? Leading tours at the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park? Singing gold rush songs in Skagway, Alaska?

My late husband and I mostly worked at national parks; our recreation was right out our door. Though hard to pick a favorite, my heart place was Alaska. I was immersed in both stunning beauty and the history of the Klondike Gold Rush, reading copies of letters written in the 1890s.

Sometimes I had to pinch myself because we were paid to be in beautiful places!





Series Killer?

Ellen Behrens

Do you have a series killer on your hands?

You read that correctly: *series* killer—though we will discuss serial killers in a moment.

I've been reading more than writing lately, and that means I've been learning a lot. As author of the *Rollin RV Mystery* series, I've immersed myself in series fiction. Series novels feature the same main characters or different characters from the same setting (for example, Tana French's main characters are members of the Dublin Murder Squad). Each book in a series has a clear resolution to the main conflict, even if a few subplots are left open for more development in future installments (for instance, a romantic relationship plot.)

Writing a series requires detailed care. Even bestselling authors won't escape the wrath of readers who have been led to expect something only to be disappointed. Over the course of the first five books in Janet Evanovich's Fox and O'Hare series, readers had come to know (very well, it turns out!) the characters. When *The Big Kahuna* came out, the sixth in the series and written "with" (though many critics said it had to be "by") her son Peter, she got trounced with negative reviews.

The book's one-star comments make it clear Evanovich had been ramping up the relationship vibe between the two main characters as a key subplot (and story arc), which many readers were eager to see grow further in *Kahuna*. When the book came out, it had none of that. "I thought I was reading a book out of order," wrote one reader. Some critics were convinced Peter had never read the first five books. Several commented they'd never pre-order again and many said they'd never buy another Evanovich book, despite years of reading her novels.

Nobody wants that. Keeping what's called a "series bible" or "series notebook" to track all the critical information is essential for avoiding serious boo-boos (trust me on this).

Other authors' books received poor reviews because readers didn't like the fact that "the book just stopped!" Readers complained they felt cheated—lured into buying and reading a book, then having to purchase another to finish the story.

That's what happens when authors and readers misunderstand the difference between a "series" and a "serial." Serials have been around about as long as the printing press. Very early newspapers and magazines started publishing stories in segments (or chapters) to entice readers to keep buying the periodical so they could find out what happened next. There's nothing wrong with writing novels this way—just be sure you let your readers know the book is not a stand-alone story, but that the full series has to be purchased to get the full story.

Maybe getting to the last page—and having to pay more for the ending—is how serial killers got started!

Your Bio Note Matters!

When promoting your books through newsletters, blogs and other outlets, pay attention to how you phrase your bio notes. Telling potential readers who you are is just *one* thing they do.

Here are some actual biographical notes I've come across over the last few months to demonstrate how something that seems pretty straightforward can end up hurting more than helping a book's promotion. In some cases I've shortened the actual bio note with ellipses (...) to save you from having to read the entire thing.

"Michael Anthony Phillips was born in St. Louis, Missouri on July 20, 1961... As a kid Michael and his brother Sam stayed up late nights listening to the Mystery Theatre the radio that carved Michael's fondness for great storytelling...."

Errors in your bio note will make potential readers wonder if your book will be riddled with problems, too.

A memoir writer wrote:

"Donald R. Dragovich was born in Youngstown, Ohio on April 19, 1964. He was the middle son, two older brothers and two younger brothers, of the 5 Dragovich boys. Don and his brothers lived on the East side of Youngstown, Ohio until they were adults and completed college. Don attended Immaculate Conception, a Catholic elementary school on Youngstown's east side for grades 1 thru 8. He continued his catholic-oriented education by attending Ursuline High School, graduating with Honor Chords in 1982. Donald attended Youngstown State University and earned an Associates in Applied Business (A.A.B.) in 1985, majoring in Advertising Technology. It was during his Creative Writing class that he really embraced his subconscious talent for writing. His Creative Writing assignments were cited as good examples for the rest of the class to follow.

Don worked 3 different part time jobs as he attended Y.S.U. from 1982-1985 showing that you have to work hard and be versatile to be self-sufficient. After graduating from college, Don got married to Christine Alexandrides of Campbell, Ohio. Christine was Greek-Orthodox and so Donald was baptized Greek-Orthodox before they were married. Don and Christine have been married for 33 years and still going. Don and Christine have 3 children and 3 grandchildren. An infant son, Donald R. Dragovich, Jr. passed away in 1993 and is discussed in his book, 21 Days The Random Thoughts of a Brother in Mourning."

Yikes! Did you read all that? If you didn't, you missed the key point, which is the final sentence, summarizing why the author wrote this memoir, lost in a too-lengthy bio note.

"Michael Anderle (ok, weird talking about myself in the 3rd person)... was born in Houston, Tx. A very curious child, he got into trouble – a lot. What to do with an inquisitive mind when he was grounded?"

"Ok, done with all of that 3rd person stuff.

"In the first 20 years, I mostly read Science Fiction and Fantasy. In the last 10 years I have enjoyed Urban Fantasy and Military Fiction. With this background, I've been blessed with creating The Kurtherian Gambit series, a well-selling, and fan loved, collection of stories.

"The fans have propelled these stories beyond my wildest imagination and they should get all of the credit for sharing with friends, family and occasionally the random person on the street. They are fantastic!"

Poor use of humor aside, this bio note suffers from a rookie mistake: suggesting that because friends and family loved the book that we would, too.

"The author enjoys history and reading."

This is the entire bio note. So... is less really more? Maybe not. The question is, would you gamble your book money on this author?

"Marie Paul is an entrepreneur. She became interested in the occults after a psychic attack by a woman who had attached herself to Marie Paul; later she realized that this demonic woman was a vampire. Marie Paul accepts these experiences as being pushed by a force to learn, comprehend, and use her experiences to help others—because it's a lonely existence. Marie Paul Went back to college and now holds a PhD in Metaphysical Sciences. She intends to write more books highlighting her experiences and ways to relieve the evil attacks."

Marie Paul was promoting a novel. But really, wouldn't you rather read her autobiography, given what she says here? Make sure your bio note isn't so fascinating people would rather read about you than the book you're selling.

"My real name is Brian Jung. I work in a psychiatric mental health inpatient unit, but I'm trying to become a full time author and businessperson online. I love sports/fitness, politics, playing music, reading, and writing. I also love helping people become better versions of themselves. I struggled through school and procrastination, and some of the techniques that I share here helped me get through."

That all sounds okay, but the book he's promoting is "Mastering Self-Discipline: How to Develop Good Daily Habits and Curb Procrastination" and the author's byline is Robert K. Gilbert. Why use an alias for a nonfiction book, especially one on mastering self-discipline? Most of all, why use a pen name if you're going to use your real name in the bio note? Don't undermine your credibility by trying to be too clever.

"Diane Scott was born in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, where she enjoyed a twenty-five-year pediatric nursing career...."

How can a person be born in two places? More likely, the bio note needed a good edit. And the book probably does, too.

So how about a bio note that's done well? Here's one with the right balance of personal and professional detail, all with a dash of humor—in just 121 words!

"Award-winning author D.B. Sieders was born and raised in East Tennessee and spent her childhood hiking in the Great Smoky Mountains, wading bare-foot in creeks, chasing salamanders, fish, and frogs.

Her family loved to tell stories while sitting around the campfire. "Those days of frog chasing sparked her interest in biology. She is a working scientist by day, but she never lost her love of telling stories.

"D.B. writes urban fantasy and paranormal romance. Her stories feature unlikely heroes and heroines who face a healthy dose of angst as they strive for redemption and a happily ever after, which everyone deserves. She lives in Nashville, Tennessee, with a husband, two children, a rotating number of cats, and her very active imagination."

Keep your bio notes brief. Include your writing credits (if you have them). Add a bit of info about who you are apart from your writing. Include something about where you live, your family, your pets. If none of that sounds fascinating, incorporate one odd fact about your life that relates to your book.

Examples are all over Amazon and other places where books are promoted. Read a lot of bio notes, see what works, and emulate the ones that not only make you smile but make you want to read the book.

Additional reading: BookBub has a terrific article about writing a good author bio. You can find it at <https://insights.bookbub.com/great-author-bio-examples/>

