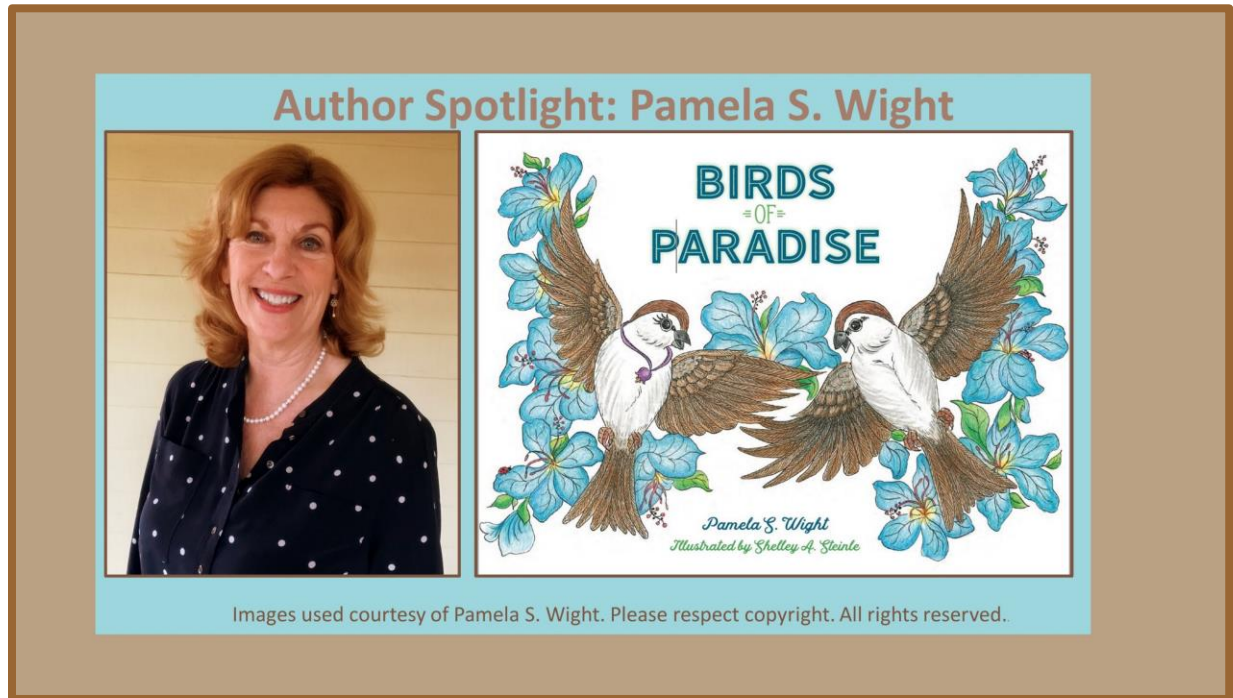


# Author Spotlight: Pamela S. Wight



## ***Pamela, when did you know you wanted to be a writer?***

I remember when I was around 3 years old, sitting in front of a bookshelf with picture books stacked side by side. Because I couldn't read yet, I opened each one and told a story from my imagination using the pictures as my guide. That's when I began my life as a writer.

## ***Where do you write? Do you like to be by yourself in the quiet, or do you like to write in a noisy space?***

I write from my upstairs home office in front of a large window that overlooks trees and the sky. I listen to the birds sing as well as soft classical music in the background.

## ***What do you use to write – pencil and paper or computer?***

Both. Many times, I write a story in my writer's notebook and then type the second draft on my computer.

## ***When do you write?***

Before I became a full-time writer, I wrote in the late afternoon after work. Now, I'm on my computer/ notebook by 5:30 a.m. and write for three or four hours. Several days a week I teach creative writing classes in the late morning or early afternoon. The days I don't, I take a break with an exercise or yoga class, then return to writing for a few hours in the afternoon.

## ***When do you get your ideas?***

My ideas seem to never stop: in the shower, at the dentist's office, in the middle of a Down Dog! I have file drawers of stories, and three half-written novels. I will never run out of ideas and characters and settings.

### ***Do you think of the story in your head before you write it?***

Never. In my creative writing classes. I stress the importance of not thinking too much in writing, so we can *feel*. I believe in letting go of the editor inside us, and instead letting out the inspirational creative “stuff” that’s often hidden.

### ***What gave you the idea for Birds of Paradise?***

I attended a creative writing class when I was a young mother. The professor dictated a prompt in which we were to write a story in 20 minutes: *Write a love story*. I began, “Bessie and Bert are birds - sparrows, humans call them. They just call themselves birds,” and the story took off. The professor called me the next day: “You have an excellent children’s story here,” he said, “you should get it published.”

### ***What do you like best about your story?***

I like the theme that friendship between two unlikely people (or in this case birds) can steer us away from trouble and instead toward joy and fulfilment.

### ***Do you like the illustrations?***

I adore Shelley Steinle’s illustrations. In fact, many publishing companies do not allow the author to choose an illustrator for his or her book. I insisted on supplying my own illustrator – Shelley – because (1) she understood Bert and Bessie and showed the importance of compassion and companionship in her drawings, (2) Shelley uses the “old-fashioned” way of drawing each line herself, never using computer technology to enhance her work.

### ***How did you feel when you wrote this story?***

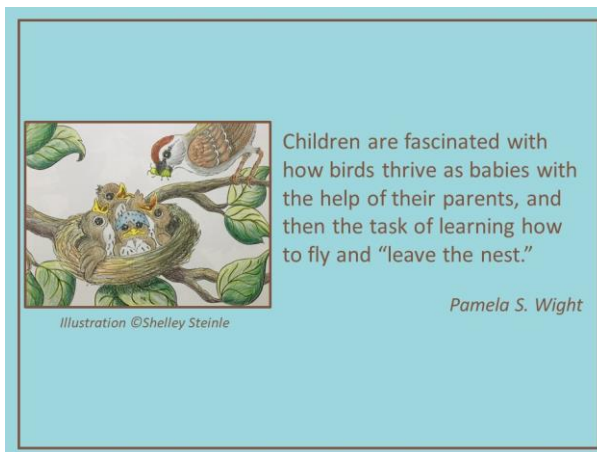
Startled and thankful. I had no idea where Bessie and Bert came from, and I was so grateful that they arrived as I wrote.

### ***How do you hope readers will feel?***

Hopeful. Happy. Adult readers tell me they get a sweet tug in their heart when they read this book. Kids tell me excitedly that they think they’ve seen Bert and Bessie in their back yard.

### ***How would you like teachers to present your book to children?***

First and foremost, as a fun and interesting story about the world of birds. Children are fascinated with how birds thrive as babies with the help of their parents, and then the task of learning how to fly and “leave the nest.”



***Are there any messages you would like them to discuss?***

I've read this story to children in elementary schools and during Storytime in many libraries. The younger children (3-4 year olds) focus on the pictures as they listen, mouths open, to the story. They love pointing at the ladybug that is found "hidden" on every page. Kids 5 and older are wide-eyed during the scene where Bert escapes the clutches of the cat, and then is bullied by others. The teachers and I smile as the kids all chime in about how their own cats chase birds. A great teachable moment arrives as the kids talk about the "bully birds" and how to find courage and believe in themselves despite taunting from others.

***Do you have any advice for teachers in their role as writing guides?***

First and foremost, I believe that children must enjoy what they read (or what is read to them). If they have fun with a book, then they'll want to write one. Also, I understand the need to teach writing rules, but children should also be allowed to just write without worrying about spelling and grammar (that can come in their second draft). They should at first be allowed to just have FUN with their story.

***Do you have any advice for children as writers?***

During my visits to elementary schools, after reading my book, I take questions & answers. The kids view authors as "celebrities," which is surprising and rewarding. (They keep asking for my "autograph"!) I explain to them that there are four rules to learning to write well: "Read, Read, Read, Read." The teachers love that rule!

***What is your favourite picture book?***

I don't have a favourite – there are so many great ones. I like picture books in which the illustrations and the story allow the child's own imagination to go wild. Examples? *Are We There Yet?* by Dan Santat, *Grandad's Island* by Benji Davies, and *Sleep Like a Tiger* by Mary Logue. But then, of course, my grandsons love *I'm Dirty* by Kate and Jim McMullan.

