

ROCKY MOUNTAIN OUTDOORS

THE NEWSLETTER OF ROCKY MOUNTAIN OUTDOOR WRITERS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS

MAY - JUNE 2008

ANGELO SCIULLI

Reflections on the Art of Living

*A man weathering a debilitating disease
has a suggestion for all of us.*

Barbara Bradley

Occupying a prominent space on the den wall of Angelo Sciulli's Lancaster home is a framed gift from his grandson's first-grade class at St. Anne's Catholic School in Rock Hill. It reads, "Thank you, Mr. Sciulli," with signatures of Christopher's classmates written in bright crayon colors.

Sciulli, who believes education holds the key to many of life's perplexities, had shared his message with the class. His subject matter; amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), is deeply personal. Often called Lou Gehrig's disease for the baseball great who died of it in 1941, ALS is an affliction to which medical research has failed to unlock the key. Its cause and cure remain a puzzle. To spark the children's interest before his presentation, Sciulli asked the teacher to distribute Lou Gehrig baseball cards with quick facts about the disease printed on the back.

While some ALS patients live longer, most die within two to five years. The disease courses through the body, attacking motor neurons in the brain and spinal cord, eventually leaving the patient totally paralyzed. Yet the mind remains intact. The patient is constantly aware of the debilitating effects of the disease - an irony, some say, as cruel as the illness itself. Often, before death releases the stranglehold, the patient has become a prisoner in his or her own body

Sciulli, 60, was diagnosed with the illness in 1998, only a year after leaving corporate life to pursue his passion for nature photography. His autobiography, *Challenging Nature Photography*, chronicles his life and transition from chemical research scientist to successful nature photographer, writer and ALS advocate. His photography (often featured in *Sandlapper*) and writings are mediums for accomplishing his mission of educating and elevating awareness of ALS. His advocacy has had far-reaching effects at home and abroad. His work has been featured in the Japanese magazine *Sinra* and throughout the United States.

In 2003, he fulfilled a lifelong dream of traveling to Italy, where he took photos in the village of Gamberale, ancestral home of both sets of grandparents. During his visit, his story was published in the *Il Messaggero* news-

paper. Unknown to Sciulli, the article made its way back to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where a Catholic priest used it as his homily during Mass. "The innocent article for an Italian newspaper had reached more people in a special way - above what I anticipated," Sciulli said.

From South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Illinois and Georgia, Sciulli's message is reaching the younger generation as educators learn of his fortitude in accomplishing his goals despite the sickness. Dr. Chesley Mercado, director of music therapy at Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville, used *Challenging Nature Photography* as a



© Angelo Sciulli

It's easy for an ALS patient to feel the tremendous loss of freedom the cheetah feels - ALS patients can only run in their dreams. Angelo Sciulli

graded assignment for her class. Students were instructed to reflect on how they would use their art of music if presented with similar difficulties in life. The same process is used in music therapy, Mercado believes - engaging strength to compensate for weaknesses, employing an art form to provide avenues for success. "It gives them an introduction to ALS from a personal perspective and insight into how an art form can transcend the difficulties of an illness or disability," Mercado said.

During his presentations, Sciulli appears to be a strong,

(Editor's Note: Barbara Bradley, who joined RMOWP after attending the 2006 conference in Moab, died last year. We publish this posthumously as a tribute to both her and Angelo. Thanks to you both for your joie de vivre.)

This article first appeared in the summer 2007 issue of *Sandlapper*, the magazine of South Carolina. *Sandlapper* is published by Sandlapper Society, Inc., a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to pointing out the positive aspects of the Palmetto State.



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Rocky Mountain Outdoors

Published bi-monthly by
Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers and Photographers, Inc.

Editor: Don Laine

Send editorial materials to Don Laine, laine@newmex.com; PO Box 1200, El Prado, NM 87529; 575-758-8922.

Deadline for newsletter submissions is the 20th of the month preceding month of publication. Newsletters are published:

Jan/Feb	Mar/Apr	May/June
July/Aug	Sep/Oct	Nov/Dec

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healthy man. Only the wheelchair and occasional help with speaking indicates something amiss. He uses either an assistant or laptop computer with voice technology to "speak" for him. His presentation, "Take a Walk in My Wheelchair," is tailored to each audience and geographic location and is spiked with his characteristic good humor. It includes his movie of nature and wildlife images from the U.S., Canada, Kenya, Ecuador, Italy and Newfoundland. Each image is accompanied by dialogue related to ALS.

One scene portrays a cheetah, held captive in a rehab center near Nairobi, Kenya. The inert position and haunting look in its eyes seem to indicate the cheetah has lost the 'will to live.' Sciulli's relevant comments read, "It's easy for an ALS patient to feel the tremendous loss of freedom the cheetah feels - ALS patients can only run in their dreams."

Referring to himself as "the world's premier non speaking comedian," Sciulli has a ready, often humorous response to questions from his audience.

"What motivates you to continue pursuing your goals?" is one frequent question.

"Bears," he replies, as laughter erupts. "Humor and laughter heal," Sciulli says.

When asked if he has regrets about his life before his diagnosis, Sciulli says no. He points out that he's a veteran, postgraduate student, husband, father and grandfather. To him, life is a continuum of events leading to the present. "The future is one instant in front of us and the present is an instant from the past. If you live in the now, it exists as a moment in time connecting the future with the past. If you live like the future is not a guarantee, then the now is exactly what you should be doing. In my case, my 'now moments' allowed me to reach my goals."

Sciulli, a Pittsburgh native, tells students to find their purpose in life and enjoy each moment. "There are no guarantees in our lives," he says. "Make sure that you have no regrets and live each day savoring the now."

Even though he lives with a disabling illness, 90 percent of Sciulli's images were photographed since his diagnosis. "No one can look at my images and tell that I have this disease."

In November 2004, Sciulli's unflappable, dogged determination captured the attention of the national ALS Association as one of its "Stories of Courage." It's featured on the association's Web site, www.alsa.org. In September 2005, he was awarded the Muscular Dystrophy Association's Personal Achievement Award for South Carolina. In October, 2006, the MDA Charlotte South District, ALS Division, presented an award of appreciation to Sciulli. The framed plaque includes a letter from legendary comedian and MDA Chairman Jerry Lewis, whose name is synonymous with MDA. Lewis expressed gratitude to Sciulli for his commitment to MDA and for his help in raising awareness of ALS through his photography. "Your hard work is much appreciated," Lewis wrote. "The

pieces you submitted to the MDA Art Collection are stunning and bring joy to all who see them. You inspire us all to strive harder to meet our goals."

Sciulli and his wife Janet have two children and one grandchild, Christopher. Sciulli says he will continue his writing, nature photography, ALS advocacy and fundraising activities until medical research unlocks the key to this mysterious illness. His reason for persevering is simple - he wants a cure.

Barbara Bradley contributed frequently to The Lancaster News and has won public service awards from the South Carolina Press Association and Landmark Community Newspapers for reportage on ALS and other neurological diseases. She lived in Lancaster, SC.



Scratch that itch! © Sherry Zurey
(2007 Humorous Photo Entry)

Three Scholarships Awarded

More than dozen students applied for the RMOWP's 2008 Scott-McKenna Memorial Scholarship. Chair Mike Hammond tells us he contacted ten major universities, four secondary level universities and three junior colleges.

Out of these, RMOWP has awarded three scholarships, one for \$1000 and two for \$500 each. Treasurer Lee Carr will send checks to their schools.

Top applicant and recipient of the \$1000 scholarship is Kelli Edwards. A student at the University of Texas A&M Bryan College Station, Kelli hopes to eventually write and photograph for a publication that promotes the agricultural community and the great outdoors.

Hunter Nichols of Birmingham, Alabama will receive a \$500 scholarship. Hunter's goal is to use photography to bring the destruction of the environment to the immediate attention of the American public, and has already begun

this work with a Cahaba River documentary. Hunter studies at the University of Auburn, Alabama.

The second \$500 scholarship recipient is Kasey Muth, a student at the University of Texas Tech Lubbock. Both a writer and photographer, Kasey has a great interest in and love of the outdoors, and plans to pursue a career in advertising.

Congratulations Kelli, Hunter and Kasey, and welcome to RMOWP. Each also receives a free one-year membership.

Countdown to Estes Park

Barb Laine

Ladies and gentlemen - start your countdowns! With Memorial Day behind us, RMOWP's annual conference is almost here.

The 35th conference begins Sunday, June 8 and the fun continues through Thursday, June 12, in Estes Park, Colorado, the eastern portal for Rocky Mountain National Park. Writing and photo ops plus workshops to hone our skills abound. Not to mention visiting with friends both old and new: At last count we had 13 new people registered!

A note for those not familiar with life in the Rocky Mountains: the elevation in Estes Park is a bit over 7500 feet and Trail Ridge Road climbs to 12,187 feet at Fall River Pass. This translates to the bracingly thin air that often provides magnificent clear blue skies, but also brings sudden temperature changes. Through the course of a sunny day temperatures can range from cool-to-downright-cold in the early morning to quite warm in the afternoon, returning to chilly that evening. Layers are great - removable as the day warms and reapplicable when the sun drops.

So pack your bags and we'll see you Sunday, June 8 at Estes Rodeway Inn (1701 N. Lake Ave./US 34). Questions? Or haven't registered yet? Contact Don Laine, 575-758-8922 or laine@newmex.com.

WHAT ELSE to BRING to the CONFERENCE

FOR THE PHOTO CRITIQUE (7:30 pm Monday June 9)

Entertaining and informative for all, this program looks at photographs with an eye to improvement. If you want your shots critiqued, bring 3 to 5 slides or digital images on CDs to the Rodeway Inn meeting room by 7:15 p.m. Monday. Spectators are welcome.

FOR THE WRITERS' CRITIQUE (9 am Tuesday June 10)

Your written work will be gently and positively examined apropos of finding ways to improve it at this session. Participants should bring at least 5 copies of no more than 5 pages of double-spaced (or equivalent) unpublished work. It should not be your best work, but something you want help with. Spectators are welcome. (cont. next page)

DONATIONS FOR THE AUCTION (3 pm Wednesday June 11)

We want your stuff for the RMOWP Auction, which raises money for our scholarship fund. Items donated so far by supporting members include a tent, multi-fuel stove, and some nifty high-tech lights from the Coleman Company. RMOWP's individual members are always equally generous, bringing their own photos and books, plus photo equipment, crafts, gift items, food and drink, and a variety of things they've found lying around the house.

PHOTOS FOR THE MEMBERS' CHOICE CONTEST (vote during the auction; winners announced after the banquet)

Don't forget your entries for the Members' Choice photography contest. We've made some changes this year due to the large number of photos entered the last two years.

Each person may submit no more than two (2) unframed, matted prints in black and white or color. On each of your one or two photo(s), write one of the following categories on the back: Scenic, Flora, Fauna. Altered/manipulated images are eligible. Maximum print size is 8 x 12 inches, and may be matted to no more than 12 x 16 inches.

Submit your entries at registration, or no later than the start of the Photo Critique session at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, June 9. Questions? Contact Maryann Gaug at the conference or before at megaug@earthlink.net or 970-468-6219.

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