

# Rocky Mountain Outdoors

the newsletter of Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers & Photographers, Inc.

July – August 2020

*President's Column*

## 2020 RMOWP Conference CANCELLED

By Virginia Parker Staat

With heavy hearts and a unanimous decision, RMOWP's Board of Directors, Conference Committee, and staff have voted to cancel our 2020 conference scheduled in Alamogordo, New Mexico, from October 5-8. RMOWP has held annual conferences since 1974. This is the first time we have cancelled. Due to COVID-19 concerns, however, we face tremendous uncertainty about our ability to provide a safe and positive experience for participants. Your health and safety are our utmost concern.

At this time, we also have no reliable way to measure accessibility to different conference venues, planned field trips, and various meeting areas. Currently, White Sands National Park has begun a phased re-opening. However, parts of the park remain closed and group activities are limited. Our contact at the park advised that because New Mexico is taking a cautious approach to reopening, group size and access to various park areas will most likely be limited throughout the remainder of the year.

RMOWP is certainly not the only group facing event cancellations. Concerns about a possible second wave of the virus this fall (and uncertainty about New Mexico's health order response if that were to happen) have left many organizations wondering about their options. As we look to other groups with upcoming events, we have learned that both the Albuquerque Hot Air Balloon Fiesta in October and the Festival of the Cranes at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in November have also been cancelled.

In spite of all this uncertainty, however, we also have good news to report. We plan to go ahead with this year's photo and writing contest (see page 4). Entry deadline has been advanced to July 15, 2020. Please check our website ([rmowp.org](http://rmowp.org)) for contest rules and entry forms.

Plans for our RMOWP 2021 conference are also underway. In order to regain momentum and, hopefully, attract the greatest number of participants, we have rescheduled the 2021 conference to take place in Alamogordo, New Mexico, nearer our membership base. We hope you'll join us for a pre-conference photo workshop, a sand dune photography workshop, writing workshops, and more.

We are also excited about RMOWP's 2022 conference. It will be held in Fort Davis, Texas, during a new moon and under the star-filled skies of the Davis Mountains. During the 2022 conference, we hope you'll join us for a night sky photo workshop and lots of Texas-style fun.

On behalf of RMOWP, thank you for your continued support and understanding during these unprecedented times. Let's stay connected until our next conference through phone calls, emails, letters, and social media. (Remember that RMOWP is now on Instagram at <https://www.instagram.com/outdoorwritersandphotogs/> ).

We hope to see each of you next year in Alamogordo. Until then, blessings and good health to each of you.



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*Batu listens intently to distant coyotes—some 2km distant—howling at sunset at White Sands . (Or is he waiting for the RMOWP conferene?) © 2010 William Horton*

# A few photos of White Sands—America's youngest National Park



Group picnic area at White Sands. (Yep—that's Zoe and Don wandering around.) © 2019 Barb Laine



Morning fog shrouds the area around White Sands.  
© 2017 William Horton



Sledding—nope, that's not snow— down the cool gypsum crystals of White Sands. © 2019 Barb Laine

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The setting sun backlights a soaptree yucca along a dune ridge at White Sands. © 2009 William Horton

Writer's Corner

## Listen to the Music

by Virginia Parker Staat

*When the lyrical muse sings, the creative pen dances.*

~Aberjhani

I am working to revive an old manuscript. The story is the retelling of a myth I found buried in the ancient Mayan *Popol Vuh*. It is a strange and lovely story but has remained so incomplete and unsatisfying to me that I tucked it away in a drawer for nearly twenty years. When I pulled it out of its hiding place several weeks ago, the secret to what is missing fairly exploded in my face. Quite simply, my words lack rhythm. They do not dance.



Virginia with her beloved  
Roxanne

We use rhythm in our writing to set our story's mood. It is not about writing rhyme or flowery and fancy words. It's about combining words like a composer builds a symphony to make his music a sensory experience.

Author Henneke Duistermaat writes, "In music, tone length and the silences in between tones define rhythm. When long notes blend together without silences, the music flows smoothly. In contrast, when you play short notes with clear pauses in between, you get a more abrupt style of playing. It wakes you up. In writing, rhythm is defined by punctuation and the stress patterns of words in a sentence. Long sentences sound smoother, while short sentences make your content snappier. When each sentence follows the same structure and rhythm, your writing becomes boring."

Writing lyrical prose is especially important in our nature writing. In addition to setting our story's mood, it pulls our readers in, helping them connect with landscape and subject. For a more recent example, I invite you to read *The Eagle's Way* by Jim Crumley. A more thorough examination of writing lyrical nature prose can be found in Mark Tredinick's *The Land's Wild Music*, which focuses on the prose of outdoor writers Barry Lopez, Peter Matthiessen, Terry Tempest Williams, and James Galvin.

To briefly illustrate rhythm and how it sets our story's mood, let's look at a few lines from the children's book *The Man Who Could Call Down Owls*, by Eve Bunting. An award-winning and prolific writer, Bunting is best known for her quiet, lyrical prose. These few lines offer an excellent example of how she draws emotion from her readers using rhythm.

*"An owl no bigger than a sparrow came to  
nestle in the shadow of the wide hat.*

*'Elf owl.' The man smoothed the pale chest*

*feathers till the owl eyes closed.*

*Deep in the dark of the trees was a hoot, hoot,  
hooting and a great horned cut the air to land on  
a stunted branch, so close that the boy could see  
the ring of white feathers that lay mysteriously at  
its throat.*

*Owls everywhere. And the man in the middle,  
his cloak drifting about him like marsh mist, and  
Con, always Con, and the man with the owls  
around him."*

Bunting uses similes and metaphors to evoke images in her words. She uses alliteration and repetition to create patterns. She uses a syllabic style to set her cadence. She uses punctuation to control pace and space and rhythm. She uses sentence length to establish tone and topic. In short, her words dance the mystery surrounding the man who could call down owls.

With a strategy found in Roy Peter Clark's book *Writing Tools*, we can use math to analyze how the lyrics flow in these few paragraphs from Bunting's work. Bunting writes 102 words in six sentences. These sentences contain 17, 2, 12, 43, 2, and 26 words respectively. The longer the motion described, the longer her sentence.

Clark writes that the rhythm becomes more interesting when we match sentence length to content and use it to create suspense and control emotion. He continues, "The writer controls the pace for the reader, slow or fast or in between, and uses sentences of different lengths to create the music, the rhythm of the story."

In Bunting's last sentence, using 26 words, readers can nearly feel the cold wind in the man's cloak as it swirls about him. Gary Provost explains this technique in his book, *100 Ways to Improve Your Writing*. He writes that a sentence of considerable length "burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals – sounds that say, listen to this, it is important."

To repair my Mayan myth, I am studying our photographs from the great Mayan city of Teotihuacán and its surrounding countryside to awaken memories. I am listening to ancient Mayan songs to familiarize myself with the beat used during the time of the *Popol Vuh*. I plan to rearrange my words to fit the rhythm that best evokes the story's energy, building my cadence with appropriate metaphors, similes, alliteration, and repetition. Finally, I will sound out my words, reading them aloud to make certain the story's intensity ebbs and flows until it reaches a crescendo.

At our best, when we write, we write music. Our words resonate with rhythm. They blend together like a melody. They mesmerize and pull our reader in, creating mood, emotion, and tone. In essence, they make our pens dance.



## CONTEST UPDATE

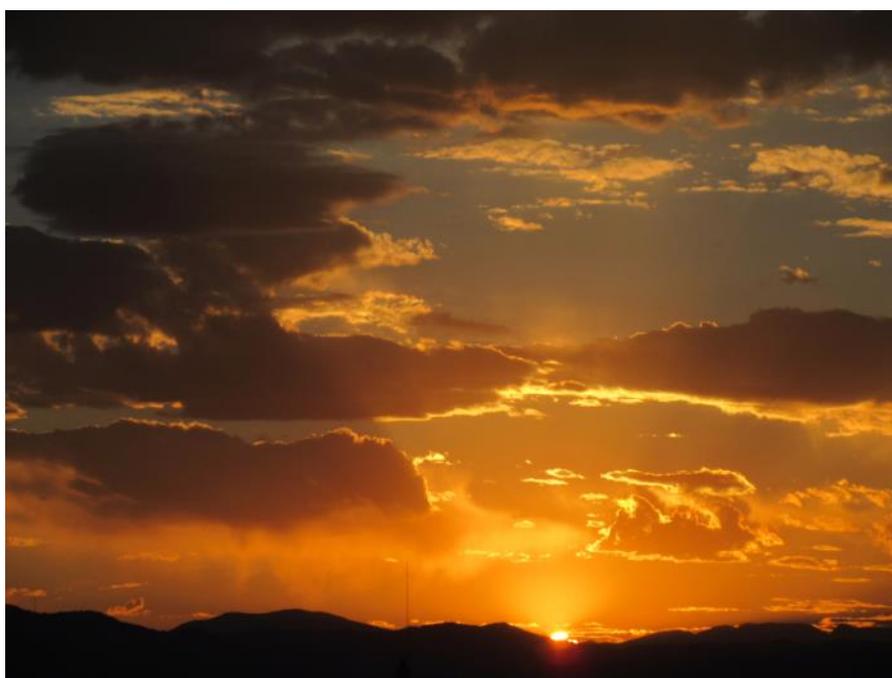
RMOWP's 2020 writing and photography contest is still happening, despite the cancellation of the conference.

The only contest changes are that (1) We are extending the deadline for entries to **Wednesday, July 15**, and (2) The **members' choice photo contest**, which takes place at the annual conference, is on hold until next year.

So, what are you waiting for? If you haven't done so already, get your writing and photography entries to contest chair Frank Zurey pronto!

There are no changes to the rules from last year, and both rules and entry forms are available at <https://rmowp.org/annual-conference/>.

## We have a Cecil...



© Jack Olson

By Don Laine

A Cecil, according to RMOWP's own Jack Olson, is a sunrise or sunset photo named in honor of Academy Award-winning producer Cecil B. DeMille (1881-1959), whose Biblical films featured characters such as Moses atop a mountain, arms raised to the fiery sky. You don't capture Cecils very often, Jack tells us. They must be special in one way or another, a spectacular show in the sky, reminiscent of DeMille's epic films.

DeMille did have at least one problem with the rising or setting sun, according to Internet Movie Database: During his silent days, DeMille was filming a romantic scene on a California beach. The script called for the couple to be walking along the beach as the sun slowly rose over the ocean behind them. When informed that the sun doesn't rise over the ocean there but sets, DeMille told the camera crew to get a shot of a spectacular sunset and he would use rear-screen projection and run the film in reverse to make it look like sunrise.

The actors were filmed on a soundstage and the sunset footage was reversed and projected on a rear screen to look like a sunrise. The film looked perfect, until DeMille noticed that the waves on the beach were flowing backwards into the ocean and the seagulls were all flying backwards!

About the above image, Jack tells us, "this sunrise was epic. When I got up it was mostly dark but I could see mountain wave clouds in the sky. That's a good sign that something might be about to pop. So I set up looking out the open front sliding door to my porch. I took 58 shots! Over 26 minutes."

## Pie Lady of Pie Town Calls it Quits

By Don & Barbara Laine

New Mexico has lost an institution.

The Pie-O-Neer Pie Bar in Pie Town, New Mexico, has closed after more than 20 years in business, a victim of the Coronavirus pandemic. The announcement was made by owner Kathy Knapp, according to an article in the Socorro, New Mexico, newspaper "El Defensor Chieftain." She told the newspaper that she opened the pie shop for the season this year on Pi Day (March 14), but because of the pandemic closed the next day. More on Pi Day below.

A number of RMOWP members will remember Pie Town and the Pie-O-Neer from the 2001 conference of New Mexico Outdoor Writers and Photographers (NMOWP), a group with which RMOWP had numerous cross-over members at the time. That conference, organized by Anne Sullivan, a member of both organizations, took place during Pie Town's annual Pie Festival in September.

Over the years the Pie-O-Neer and Ms. Knapp were featured in numerous articles nationally and regionally, including in *Sunset Magazine*, *The Food Network*, and TV's "CBS Sunday Morning." Last year, the pie shop was honored by *New Mexico Magazine* for its chocolate cream pie, naming it the best dessert in the state in the "down-home" category.

Former RMOWP president Kelly Gatlin, of Datil, New Mexico, who served 11 consecutive years as a RMOWP board member and officer, retired from the National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO) after 21 years. The agency operates the Very Large Array radio telescope on the Plains of St. Agustin, halfway between the communities of Magdalena and Datil in west central New Mexico.

At the time the Pie-O-Neer opened in the mid-1990's, Kelly met Knapp

and her family when he was stationed at the Pie Town Very Long Baseline Array, one of NRAO's ten radio antennas. During NMOWP's conference, we enjoyed a chicken pot pie dinner at the Pie-O-Neer, and Kelly led attendees on tours of both radio telescope sites. (Note: The NRAO radio telescope facility is featured prominently in the 1997 film "Contact," starring Jodie Foster and Matthew McConaughey).

Pie Town, with a population of fewer than 200, sits along U.S. 60, two miles west of the Continental Divide and about 83 miles west of Socorro, New Mexico. In the early 20th century a bakery in the community produced very popular apple pies, thus the town's name.

Kelly told us that at one time there were four cafes in town – two full-service and two pie shops. The Pie-O-Neer, which began as a cafe at the site of an old trading post, had evolved into a pie shop. Then there were just two – The Gatherin' Place cafe and Pie-O-Neer. Now it's just the Gatherin' Place. "Good news is," Kelly said, "there's still pie in Pie Town and the Gatherin' Place sells lots of 'em."

So, what's Pi Day? Well, to start with, as any math geek can tell you, pi ( $\pi$ ) is the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter, any circle, any size, anywhere. After thousands of years of measuring circular objects, this ratio was determined to be a bit more than 3.14159 and on and on ad infinitum. And because it is a constant number, never ever changing, Pi Day is March 14th (3.14). Mathemati-

cians celebrate primarily by eating pie – any kind of pie, from apple to rhubarb to pizza – or consuming any other food beginning with "pi," such as pineapples and pistachios. (Check out [piday.org](http://piday.org) if you don't believe us.)



*Kathy Knapp, the Pie Lady of Pie Town for a number of years. © Kelly Gatlin*



*The Pie-O-Neer was a popular spot. © Kelly Gatlin*

# HOPE EVERYONE HAD A HAPPY 4TH!



Fireworks © Fred Lord  
1st Place Events, 2014 Photo Contest



The Pie-O-Neer closes its doors—see the story on page 5.

## 2020-2022 RMOWP Calendar

July 15, 2020 ~ NEW Contest submission deadline

Fall 2021 ~ Conference — Alamogordo, New Mexico, and White Sands National Park

Fall 2022 ~ Conference — Fort Davis, Texas, and photographing the night sky

See [www.rmowp.org](http://www.rmowp.org) for details.

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