

Rocky Mountain Outdoors

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

January - February 2021

President's Column

Goodbye 2020 and WELCOME 2021!

By Virginia Parker Staat

Well, that was one crazy experience! I'm certain I'm not the only one who is excited that we finally made it past 2020. We all deserve kudos just for surviving it. I'm anxious to start a new year with new adventures, connections, and possibilities, including exciting things for RMOWP.

As we look to expand our profile and visibility, I am happy to announce that RMOWP's first promotional video is up and running on our new YouTube channel. Thanks to all who helped to make this happen, especially Kit Horton and Barb Laine. To watch the video, just go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xas51JTyJ34>.

In addition to our promotional video, we have also uploaded our 2020 Humorous Photo Contest video. For a chuckle or two, just click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swe5HX5hs-c>.

We plan to upload other contest videos soon and maybe even some quick tutorials.

I welcome your input and would love to hear your ideas, particularly on how we can stay connected and expand RMOWP's visibility during the coming year. Just email me at prez@rmowp.org. Best wishes to you and yours for a healthy and adventurous 2021.

"Fireworks 2013" © Fred Lord



Best of Show Writing 2020 Contest

Am I Really Retired?

By Richard Holmes, April 2020

It just occurred to me that I might be retired. I had not thought of that before. Could I have just eased into it without noticing?

After transitioning from one activity to another over the years, retirement may have occurred during one of those transitions. Or did it? My mind is certainly not retired—it's just as curious and creative as ever. I think. And it's just as capable of blundering into mistakes or drawing wrong conclusions as it ever was. I'm sure.

So maybe my body is retired. That seems more likely. It hasn't totally quit working, but it's certainly yielding to reduced activities, even abandoning a few. All done unwillingly.

I think I've figured it out. The body doesn't retire all at once. It does it in stages. My feet retired just last week. They ache and don't want to participate in life's endeavors anymore. The feet have a lot of moving parts. There are 26 bones in each foot, and all 52 of them whine and complain after a long hike.

Flexibility retired several years ago, followed shortly by balance—which hinders walking a log across a stream.

My shoulder took early retirement with a torn rotator cuff eight years ago. And with no warning. It just said, "That's

it." But it mysteriously decided to come out of retirement within a year after mending on its own.

Knee bones and hip bones still work just fine and have shown few signs of wanting to slack off. They have threatened to on occasions, but keep hanging in there. The head bone is another matter. It stubbornly clings to occasional absentmindedness.

Disjointed joints take turns vying for attention. A finger, wrist, elbow, shoulder, ankle—all rear up unpredictably for recognition, then subside after expressing their presence.

My eyes were headed toward semi-retirement, but the cataract doctor extended their useful life by removing the cataracts. Now I can read street signs and see other cars while driving.

When I could no longer hike easily at high altitude I realized my lungs had objected and had gone into semi-retirement. However, that came on slowly, giving me ample time to alter my mountain activities. Meaning high altitude hiking had receded into the past.

Two teeth did retire recently—permanently. They got stuck to a pair of pliers wielded by the tooth doctor, who's determined to replace them with implants. A tooth doctor is similar to the tooth fairy in that he takes a tooth away. But he doesn't leave money in its place. Instead, he takes it.

I need to conclude. As I'm writing this, my left foot is speaking to me. It recently acquired plantar fasciitis.

RMOWP Announcements

CONFERENCE 2021 – WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO? – SURVEY COMING YOUR WAY

With vaccines becoming available and work on various treatments underway, we're optimistic that the Coronavirus pandemic will soon be under control. However, in the meantime it's difficult to make specific plans for a 2021 RMOWP conference.

Tentative plans call for a conference next fall – perhaps late September or early October – and we ask you to block out some time then. Our first choice for this year's conference had been Alamogordo, New Mexico, and White Sands National Park, essentially what we had planned for 2020. However, due to the current restrictions at the park and other area attractions we don't know if that will be feasible, so we are also considering other possibilities.

But what do you, RMOWP's members, want to do? In particular, assuming the Coronavirus is still with us, would you be comfortable attending a conference later in 2021, and what locations you would prefer and feel safest in.

To find out, the conference committee will send out a short survey via email in a few weeks, and we hope to make a decision, or at least a tentative decision, sometime in February.

BOARD MEETING

RMOWP's Board of Directors will be conducting a board meeting via email between Wednesday 13 January and Tuesday 19 January. In addition to the usual board business of approving minutes; hearing reports from Treasurer Maryann Gaug, Executive Director Don Laine, Web Goddess Barb Laine, Contest Coordinator Frank Zurey, and the Conference Committee, the board will be presented with a request to repeal the existing and adopt new By-laws. (See next announcement.)

BY-LAWS UPDATE

It became apparent this last year that our By-laws are sadly out-of-date. A committee, comprised of Maryann Gaug, Barb Laine, and Virginia Staat, reorganized and re-worked the By-laws to simplify and hopefully clarify how RMOWP operates. After the Board adopts the new ones (hopefully at this month's electronic board meeting) the membership — that's YOU! — will be asked to do the same. Watch your mailboxes for this important mailing.

FROM TREASURER MARYANN GAUG

It's January — which means it's **membership renewal time**. Renewal notices were emailed on Jan. 8, 2021. Your directory listing was included in case any changes are needed. Please remember that anyone who does not renew by March 31, 2021 will be dropped from membership. Emails were sent on Jan. 9, 2021 to those whose membership is still current, thanking them for being a member, along with the directory listing in case any changes are needed. ~ Thanks!

Congratulations to Ron Belak, Kelly Gatlin, and Clare Gutierrez for achieving Life membership in RMOWP, after 25 years with the group.

Writer's Corner

Speed Bumps

By Virginia Parker Staat

"Easy reading is damn hard writing."
~ Nathaniel Hawthorne



Speed bumps exist in both parking lots and in our writing. The first are necessary to slow speeding vehicles. But do we ever want to slow down our readers? This is not about how we pace our writing. Rather, I'm talking about speed bumps that force our readers to backtrack, reread, or skip our words. Speed bumps can stall our readers from moving forward. Speed bumps can be deadly to our work.

The most dangerous speed bumps in our writing include verbose verbiage, problem punctuation, and distracting dialogue. Let's look at each of these speed bumps and how we can remedy them.

I love the word verbiage. It is a derivative of the Middle French word *verbier*, which means *to chatter*. Verbiage in our writing includes excessive descriptions, long-winded passages, passive voice, needless repetitions, and highfalutin or flowery

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but meaningless words. Examples of verbiage include paragraph after paragraph of pointless description that your reader skips. Verbiage is using phrases such as *due to the fact that* rather than the single word *because*. Verbiage is using too many metaphors, similes, imagery, or figurative language. It is using highfalutin words that send your reader to the dictionary too many times. It is using words like *beautiful* that do nothing to paint a picture in your reader's mind. At my age, I wholeheartedly agree with Mokokoma Mokhonoana's quote: "Verbosity wastes a portion of the reader's or listener's life."

Punctuation speed bumps include missing, redundant, or misused punctuation. Leaving punctuation out of a sentence can cause hilarious or dangerous results. Extra or unnecessary punctuation interrupts your sentence flow. Misused punctuation makes your work appear sloppy. Each of these punctuation errors requires your reader to backtrack. As Lynne Truss, author of *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves*, writes, "Proper punctuation is both the sign and the cause of clear thinking."

Some of the most egregious speed bumps concern dialogue, particularly dialogue that doesn't advance the story or is unattributed. To escape this speed bump, make certain your dialogue involves action and moves your plot forward. Remember also that simple dialogue tags (i.e., *he said, she said*) become invisible to your reader. Les Edgerton in *Hooked* warns writers, "Unless the dialogue is crystal clear as to who's talking to whom and about what, the reader may have to go back and reread dialogue again once she figures out the context and who the participants are and their relationship to each other."

Writer Jami Gold explains why speed bumps can be so disastrous in our writing: "On some level, keeping readers immersed in the story should be our number one writing goal. Each time the reader is reminded that they're reading a book—for whatever reason—we're reminding them they have a choice to *close* the book. Readers who are deep into the story don't consciously think about the words on the page, much less the pages in the book. They're right alongside our characters. Therefore, they *forget* they can walk away."

Driving down a road with too many speed bumps can ruin a road trip. The same is true when our readers encounter too many speed bumps in our stories. The best kind of writing is effortless for our readers. In the words of author Scott Bell Hamilton, "care enough about your readers to study the craft so you can root out speed bumps. Some will slip by. You just don't want to fill the road with them."

Sherry Zurey Dies

Longtime RMOWP member Sherry Zurey, 78, of Golden, Colorado, died January 6th. We all remember Sherry's lovely smile, cheerful willingness to pitch in whenever and wherever needed, and of course the scrumptious cookies she brought to conferences. She also served on the RMOWP board of directors and won several awards for her photography. She'll be missed, but with happy memories.



Sherry Zurey with husband Frank and their granddaughter Emily Harrington at the 2011 conference in Torrey, Utah. All three won awards in that year's photo contest.

Sherry's daughter Deanna told us that Sherry had endured a very brave battle with Lewy Body Dementia, but succumbed to COVID. Originally from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Sherry Baier was studying at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee where she met Frank Zurey. They married in 1965, moved to Colorado in 1969, and it has been home ever since. In 1977 Frank and Sherry moved to Coal Creek Canyon, where they built their home on 35 majestic acres atop Mt. Zurey and raised their two children.

Sherry enjoyed the serenity and small community of Coal Creek where she was a stranger to no one, according to Deanna. It made her day to work at Coal Creek Elementary School, where she loved every child that came in the door. Her caring spirit extended to her friends and family, especially through her love of cooking and shared meals. Sherry also loved to camp and travel and enjoyed regular trips to Alaska with Frank. When she was not adventuring, she employed her incredible creativity and indulged in many crafts, including tole painting, sewing, crocheting, quilting, and photography.

Survivors include husband Frank, son Frank IV and his partner David, daughter Deanna and her husband Tim Harrington, and granddaughters Emily and Katee Harrington. Contributions in Sherry's memory can be made to Jeffco Serving Kids, an all-volunteer program of Jeffco Schools Foundation (jeffcoschoolsfoundation.org) that

distributes clothing to local students in-need. For years Sherry made it a mission to gather new socks and undies to support this effort.



"Butterfly on Flower"

© John Thornton

2nd Place Members Choice, 2018

Jack's Jaunts

Celebrating the Fall of the Berlin Wall



Text and photos by Jack Olson
November 9, 2019, marked the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall. I was in East Berlin in 1959. It was two years before the infamous

wall was built and during a time when the Iron Curtain had imprisoned most people in Communist nations. At the time, I was a foreign exchange student with the Dutch Foreign Trade School. It was during my junior year at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana.

This was a very tense time. Berlin was the one little hole where the Iron Curtain had not reached completely. West Berlin was still occupied by four powers: the Soviet Union, U.S., France and Britain. If people wanting to escape could get to Berlin, they could make it to freedom, although they had to leave all their belongings behind. People were pouring across the border, primarily young professionals. The Soviets built the wall to prevent talent and youth from escaping.

When I arrived in Berlin, it was 14 years after the end of World War II. Ruins from the War were evident all over East



Unter den Linden, a street like Times Square or the Champs Elysees. Think of the movie or play "Cabaret" - that's what would have been here.

Berlin, while West Berlin was flourishing, building a modern city. In those days, it seemed that the Dutch Foreign Student Bureau could do anything. They arranged a trip to Berlin for my friend Don Roll from Chicago, another foreign student, and myself. We took a train from Holland and arrived in West Berlin.

We were allowed to walk into East Berlin, but were questioned by authorities before we entered. I felt very uneasy, particularly because taking photos was prohibited. I had slipped my camera into my trench coat. We had exchanged money on the black market so that we could shop in East Berlin. We saw an operetta and ate at the finest

restaurant in order to spend all our money. We passed many propaganda signs, each telling people that their enemy was the West.

Later we visited a refugee center in West Berlin. I wasn't



Photography was forbidden, so photos were taken surreptitiously from the bus window during a tour of the city. Translated, the sign on this building states "We demand: peace treaty for Germany and a demilitarized, free city of West Berlin!"

allowed to take pictures that showed people, so I took photos of some of the buildings. We sat in on one interview with a woman telling her story. The Bureau provided a simultaneous translator for us so that we could understand the conversation. The woman told us that she had heard the Secret Police were coming. She left a note for her husband in the refrigerator, took the kids and fled. Our translator told us that after refugees were processed, they would find a home for them in West Germany and fly them out.

We also visited a West Berlin memorial dedicated to the Russian soldiers who had liberated Berlin from the Nazis. Soldiers guarded the memorial. I had been studying the Russian language and began singing a Russian drinking song. The soldiers put down their guns and began singing with me. Their commanding officer quickly came over and started yelling at them. They picked up their guns, and we left.



An East Berlin policeman stops a woman to check her papers.

Cont. on pg. 5, see "Jaunts..."

"Jaunts..." from pg. 4

Fast forward from 1959 to thirty years ago. I remember the day the Berlin wall fell. It was November 9, 1989. I was beside myself with emotion, kneeling in front of the television, watching for hours. I was so happy, I was crying. I had been in Berlin when it was such a terrible time. It became worse when they built the wall.

A friend of mine was in Berlin when the wall fell. She was sitting on the west side, playing her guitar. She called to tell me that an East German soldier crawled through a hole in the wall and kissed her on the cheek. She sent me a small piece of the wall that she had notarized as an authentic piece. I kept it displayed in my apartment for years.

The fall of the Berlin wall was a long time coming. It had been a way of imprisoning people. The transition was tough at first because folks on the East side had it so much worse. But now it is all good. I feel like it is the way the world has to be. People need to go where they want to go and do what they want to do.



Ruins were everywhere. And even more or less intact buildings, unless new (few), were riddled with bullet holes.

National Park Service - 2021 Free Admission Days

Want to visit a national park, monument, or other National Park Service property this year and don't have a pass? Choose the right day and admission is free.

Continuing a long-established tradition, the park service begins the year with free admission to all National Park Service properties on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Monday, January 18. Then, there will be free admission on Saturday, April 17, the first day of National Park Week.

August gets two admission-free days this year, on August 4 for the one-year anniversary of the Great American Outdoors Act; and on Wednesday, August 25, for the National Park Service's 105th birthday.

There is also free admission on Saturday, September 25, for National Public Lands Day, and Thursday, November 11, Veterans Day.

There are 422 National Park Service properties nationwide, with at least one site in each state, and entrance fees ranging from free to \$35 for the more popular parks. Park service officials said they hope that the fee-free days will encourage everyone to spend time in the parks.

"Sunset on the Bay"
 © Beto Gutierrez
 2nd Place Scenics
 Category, RMOWP
 2020 Contest



SPENDING A NIGHT IN YOUR VEHICLE



By Peter Kummerfeldt

It happened so suddenly. One moment we were driving along the snow-packed North Park, Colorado road and the next we were in the ditch with the passenger's side door buried in the snow bank and the opposite door oriented to the sky.

After taking stock of our predicament and making sure that neither of us was injured my wife and I climbed out of our Toyota Land Cruiser onto the road. We were miles from anywhere without another car in sight. No farmhouse to walk to

for help. No cell phone to call for assistance. Just the two of us standing on the side of the road wondering how we were going to get the vehicle out.

Fast forward to the end of the story. About an hour later, after I had tried to dig the Toyota out, a road grader came along and pulled us out. If we had had to spend the night it would have been alright. Uncomfortable, but alright. We were well equipped with sleeping bags, extra clothing, the means to heat the interior of the vehicle, and food and water.

Anyone who drives faces the possibility of spending an unplanned night in a vehicle. Bad weather, breakdowns, running out of fuel, and getting stuck are some of the more common reasons why a driver might have to bed down for the night (or perhaps for several nights) until rescued. A night out does not have to be a life threatening experience. Drivers who accept the possibility that an accident might happen are drivers who prepare, in advance, for the experience. On the other hand, those drivers who deny the possibility may find themselves fighting for their lives until rescue arrives – hopefully in time!

PREPARATION

Assembling a car survival kit is the first step and, as with any survival kit, the contents should be selected based on personal needs, the season and geographic location, and the experience of those involved. (See the sidebar for a list of recommended equipment.) If you become stranded you'll be glad you took the time to put together an emergency kit.

In addition to the kit you should also evaluate the effectiveness of the clothing you are wearing to keep you warm in a cold vehicle when the engine isn't running. Most people dress to arrive at a destination and not to survive a night out. --- *Dress to survive not just to arrive!* When traveling with others don't forget to provide sufficient supplies for the additional people as well, and don't forget any pets you may have with you.

Preparation also involves ensuring that your vehicle is ready for winter travel. Never set out in stormy conditions without a full gas tank, a good battery, proper tires, a functioning heater, an exhaust system in good working condition, fresh anti-freeze, and a good dose of *common sense*.

YOU'RE STUCK!

If you do get trapped by a blizzard or severe snow storm – *don't panic!* Stay with your car and use your survival kit. Your vehicle makes a good shelter and an effective signal – *don't leave it*. In your car you are warm (warmer than being outside), dry, and protected from the weather. Trying to dig yourself out or attempting to walk to help can be fatal. *Sit tight – let the rescuers come to you!*

Move all of your emergency equipment and any other useful gear into the passenger compartment.

SHELTERING IN YOUR VEHICLE

While sitting out a storm you must use your resources sparingly – you don't know how long you'll be there. While the car will shelter you from the wind and keep you dry you will need to warm the interior. The heat your body produces is insufficient for this task.

Survival Kit

Emergency equipment to store in your vehicle

- Cellular phone with charger
- SPOT Beacon
- Four quart bottles of water
- Three dehydrated meals
- Other carbohydrate based foods
- Toilet paper
- Wipes
- Tools to include jack & spare tire
- Road flares
- Tow strap
- Booster cables
- Folding or breakdown shovel
- Blankets or sleeping bags
- Chemical hand heater packets
- Light sticks
- REI Stormproof matches
- Metal cup
- Basic first aid kit
- Knife
- Additional clothing
- Winter footwear
- Two empty cans (one for melting snow & the other for sanitary purposes)
- Sack of cat litter
- Windshield scraper and brush
- Spare personal medications
- Flashlight and spare batteries
- Portable radio with spare batteries
- Emergency candles and/or small stove
- Gloves
- Multi-purpose tool
- Ski goggles
- Duct tape
- Space blankets (used as a curtain – not to wrap up in!)
- Book to read
- 25-50 feet of nylon cord
- Flagging tape

Cont. on page 7, see "Survival..."

"Survival..." from page 6

Sitting in a car you will become cold quickly—especially your feet. Put on your warmest clothes (socks, hat, gloves, long underwear and additional insulation layers), wrap yourself in blankets or get into a sleeping bag *before* you become cold. The foot wells will be the coldest part of the vehicle. Sit sideways so that you can place your feet on a seat where the foam cushioning will offer some insulation. Alternatively, place foam padding under your feet to insulate them. Place insulation behind your head so that it does not come in contact with the cold window when you lean back.



Stuck!

Snowbound in white-out conditions on a remote dirt road, thirty miles from pavement, Virginia and David Staat's 4X4 truck was completely stuck in a five-foot-tall snowdrift. © David Staat (See their story in the last newsletter.)

If you are the sole occupant use a space blanket (or other similar material) and duct tape to partition off the back of the vehicle from the front so you only have to warm the part of the vehicle you are occupying. Ways to warm the interior of your vehicle include running the engine for short periods of time, long-burning candles, small stoves and Isopropyl alcohol/toilet paper improvised heaters. Run the engine about ten minutes each hour or for shorter periods each half hour but only after ensuring that the exhaust is not damaged and the tail pipe is clear of snow and other debris. Run the engine on the hour or half-hour – times that coincide with news and weather broadcasts.

Ventilate the vehicle by opening a downwind window approximately one inch. Carbon monoxide is a very real threat to your safety. Do not go to sleep with the engine running. Carbon monoxide poisoning can sneak up on you without warning. Almost 60% of the unintentional deaths in the United States each year are caused by carbon monoxide poisoning from motor vehicle exhausts. It is far less risky to use your clothing and other sources of heat to stay warm.

If you have to get out of the vehicle in a blizzard put on additional windproof clothing, and snow goggles if you have them, then tie a lifeline between yourself and the door handle before moving away from the proximity of the vehicle. In a white-out condition visibility can be as low as 12 inches.

Eat for heat. Without enough energy stored in your body you will not have the ability to generate the heat you need to keep your body warm. Your emergency kit should include quantities of high-calorie, non-perishable food (carbohydrate food bars).

Keep yourself hydrated. Dehydrated people have great difficulty maintaining their body temperature. *Don't eat snow!* It takes body heat to convert snow to liquid. Use your heat sources (engine heat, a candle etc.) to melt snow for your drinking water. Don't smoke – the nicotine in cigarettes reduces warm blood flow to the skin and extremities and increases the possibilities of frostbite. Don't drink alcohol – alcohol affects judgment. Bad judgment decreases the chances of survival.

GETTING RESCUED

The ability to communicate your distress is critical. Carry a fully charged cell phone and a charger that plugs into a cigarette lighter. *Dial 911 or the emergency number selected by your state to contact law enforcement officials.* It may also be possible for the cell phone companies to establish your location based on the strength of the cell phone signals. Most cell phones also carry a global positioning chip that makes locating your car easy. You still have to survive until the rescuers can get to you, but at least they know where you are.

A strong case can also be made for buying an emergency beacon, a SPOT beacon for example, if you travel to remote areas or frequently have to travel during inclement weather. Citizen Band radios are another option and could be used to make contact with other road users.

Lacking electronic communication equipment you will have to improvise – tie a flag to your vehicle's antennae, have a road flare prepared in the event that an aircraft flies over your area. If weather conditions permit, stamp out SOS in the snow and after it stops snowing, raise the car's hood. Keep the upper surfaces of your vehicle clear of snow. Remove the rearview mirror and use it to reflect a beam of sunlight to rescuers – either on the ground or in the air. Do whatever you can to draw attention to yourself.



*"Spring Tulips" © Diane Deming
1st Place Flora Category, RMOWP 2015 Contest*

Happiness and the Great Backyard Bird Count

Text and photo by Virginia Parker Staat

"I don't feed the birds because they need me; I feed the birds because I need them." ~Kathi Hutton

We have 22 resident bird species visiting our feeders this winter, not including migratory birds. I catch myself standing in front of my kitchen window most mornings, holding my coffee mug and watching the birds flit and fly or chase and chomp. Birds are mesmerizing. They make me happy.

Birds will make you happy, too. A recent study discovered that a greater biodiversity of birds in your yard equates to a greater level of happiness. The study was conducted by the German Center for Integrative Biodiversity Research. The group surveyed more than 26,000 adults from 26 European countries. Researchers concluded that observing more than 14 species of birds every day provided as much satisfaction as earning an additional \$150 per month. I guess they put a dollar figure on their findings because the study was originally published in *Ecological Economics*.

The study's lead author Joel Methorst concluded, "According to our findings, the happiest Europeans are those who can experience numerous different bird species in their daily life, or who live in near-natural surroundings that are home to many species."

For all the happiness birds give us, we can, in turn, help them this February. The 24th annual **Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)** will take place Friday, February 12, through Monday, February 15. For more information, please visit the official GBBC website at www.birdcount.org.

GBBC is designed to count birds across the globe before their annual migrations. When we participate in

the GBBC, we contribute to helping scientists understand global bird populations and patterns.

As an official GBBC citizen scientist, you simply count the number of birds and species of birds you see in any area for at least fifteen minutes. You can count birds in one or many of your favorite places, including your backyard or in a local park. After observing the species of birds and the number of each that you see, upload your findings to your free Cornell Lab account. If you need help identifying birds, the Merlin Bird ID or iNaturalist apps can help. Just download one of the apps to your smartphone and use a photo of the bird to identify it.

Based on the results of the bird diversity and satisfaction study, I'm certain our RMOWP members must be among the happiest people in the world. With our love of the outdoors and commitment to the preservation of our natural world, we can increase our joy even further by counting birds. May happiness continue to fill each of your hearts during 2021.



Bird Happiness

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