

Rocky Mountain Outdoors

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

September - October 2022

A View from the Inside

By Richard Holmes
May 2022

Looking up from my hospital bed on a warm April afternoon I see two tall women in green scrubs. One of them is the doctor who will be taking out my gallbladder, I think the one holding a butcher knife in her hand. I could shorten this tale by saying the day began with a trip to the doctor to look at a sore thumb and ended up with removal of my remaining gallbladder.

Somehow, I don't think the two are directly related. There are interceding events. The sore thumb developed from a previous cut that didn't want to heal.

I had severe stomach cramps the night before—one episode around bedtime and another an hour later. But I seemed to be all right in the morning. So I called the doctor's office about the sore thumb, which was swelling and feeling warm.

I was in no hurry, so after coffee at a friend's house and a trip to Costco I drove to the Urgent Care building. Just as well, I thought, as the stomach pains returned while at Costco. Ignoring my sore thumb the doctor asked some questions, poked around at my stomach, said she couldn't see inside, and that I should go to the emergency room where they could do a CT scan.

I did that. It was a short drive, and I put my car in the parking garage and walked into the emergency room. The pain in my stomach was really increasing. After describing my stomach cramps they had me put on a pale blue cotton dress with the back missing and lie down on a narrow bed where they began poking around my abdomen.

An IV tube was put in my arm, and a clip was placed over my finger to measure oxygen level. Little pieces of adhesive with electrical connectors were stuck to different parts of my chest. After all this was hooked up I twisted around to see a monitor displaying pulse rate, oxygen level, blood pressure and... it didn't show anything about my sore thumb. Not only was my stomach cramping again, I was beginning to feel nauseous.

They took a CT scan, and later an ultrasound, which confirmed a large gallstone mass in my gallbladder. I was set up for surgery for the next day. My friend Connie had arrived in time to watch me throw up. She called my daughter Joyce in Denver, who then texted my daughter Laura. Laura planned to drive over from Carbondale the next day. I felt miserable.

Eventually I was assigned a room for the night and was wheeled through corridors, up an elevator, and deposited into my final resting place on the third floor. Actually, I

don't like that terminology—let's say a temporary resting place for my stay in the hospital.

For some reason no one seemed concerned about my swollen thumb. They looked at me, acknowledged I had one, and continued about their business. Nearly every one I saw was a woman, mostly blond with a ponytail.

The first morning I awakened to a blue sky, fluffy clouds, and a genuinely fine-looking day. Not that it mattered. I was within the hermetically sealed space of a hospital.

The gallbladder removal would be a procedure where, instead of ripping my abdomen open to work from the inside, several small holes would be poked in me so they could work from the outside. One hole was for a camera and light. Another was used to pump a gas into my stomach, making it swollen to better see inside and maneuver the tools required for removal of the gallbladder. I wondered about the gas escaping out my other end, but I later saw a cork on a table in the operating room.

Easing myself onto a gurney I was wheeled through various corridors toward the prep room. Someone waved as I went by. I held up my swollen thumb. In the prep room I was hooked up again to check vitals.

A man with a wadded up tee shirt in one hand and a bottle of chloroform in the other, introducing himself as the anesthesiologist, came in for a few words. Actually, words are in short supply in a hospital. There is some preliminary talk at first, then people silently go about their business. That's ok for many aspects of life, but when you're flat on your back awaiting an impending event on your body you would like to hear some conversation regarding the matter at hand.

Wheeled to the operating room down the hall, I looked everything over in the room as best as I could. They said I wouldn't remember much, and they were right. I didn't. The next thing I knew I was lying awake asking when they were going to do the surgery. They told me they had finished. Unencumbered by rational thought processes, I objected they couldn't have—I just got there. They persisted, that the surgery was actually finished. Apparently, confusion and disorientation are part of the general anesthesia process.

Cont. on next page

Choices, Choices, Choices!
Three proposed locations for
upcoming conferences.

See page 3.

I guess I was finally convinced they did what they say they did when I realized I was no longer in the operating room. I looked at my thumb—still swollen. Apparently, they only attend to one thing at a time in the OR. After a half hour, they wheeled me back through the labyrinth to my final resting place—or my room, rather. My daughters were there when I arrived. I think. It’s hard to remember. Anyway, I got hooked back up to the IV.

Sometime after surgery it was determined that a camera should be plunged down my throat to see what else was down there. A different doctor would do that. He came into my room and talked about using a long tube with a light and camera on the end of it to explore my insides. The procedure was set up for the next day.

I had a new nurse that evening, a male nurse. He had been a military medic in Iraq, or Afghanistan, or someplace hot with a lot of sand. It’s hard to remember things clearly while confined to a hospital bed. Twice, I heard someone say I had good veins, whatever that means. I think it must have been the needle-poking people commenting on an easy job.

Sleep can be elusive in a hospital. Around midnight someone came to check what they call my vitals—blood pressure, temperature, oxygen, pulse rate, IQ, and general temperament. I got back to sleep, but someone woke me up again at four in the morning to see how I was doing. I was doing fine until I was awakened at four in the morning. Again—blood pressure, temperature, oxygen, pulse and perspicacity. General temperament was beginning to flag.

Laura was already in my room when I first looked up in the morning. She had arrived early to hear what the doctor had to say, ask pertinent questions, and generally observe what was going on.

Off to the operating room again after a stop in the prep room. The operating room looked familiar, but they wouldn’t let me look at it very long. The guy with the chloroform did his thing, and the next I remembered I was back in the prep room asking when they were going to do the procedure. Receiving the same answer, I said they couldn’t have, that I just got there. I was reassured a camera was indeed shoved down my throat and pictures taken. I was wheeled back to my final res...my room.

The gastroenterologist came in later to say he didn’t see anything abnormal, and that he increased the size of my sphincter. Wow! He really went deep. But he explained it was not that one, it was the sphincter in my esophagus, to more easily allow the passage of food.

He thought I should remain in the hospital one more night. One more night? I wanted out of there. People have been known to die in those places. I showed him my thumb. Maybe I should have elevated a different digit. But at least I was allowed to eat. I had not had food in over two days.

Apparently I was being fed through the IV tube. A menu was placed before me, and I was told to order whatever I wanted. I had thought hospitals brought around meals, maybe a bowl of gruel, and that was the end of it. Not

anymore. If I didn’t pick up the phone and order I didn’t eat. So I picked up the phone and ordered.

Thursday morning. Laura was there early. We were told I could go home if my oxygen level stayed above 90 percent for half an hour. Laura is a nurse. She knew what to do. When the level dipped too low she would say “Breathe, dad”, and I would inhale a couple deep breaths. On the monitor I could see the oxygen level move up over 90. This would also be seen on the monitor at the nurse’s station out in the hall.

We kept this up (breathe, dad) for over a half hour until finally someone came into the room with discharge papers. At last I was free to go home. I had inhaled myself an exit visa. I could get out of my dress, put on pants, shoes, shirt, and escape. But the escape had to be orderly. I didn’t walk, but was wheeled through the labyrinth out to the front door. Laura was bringing the car around. Once outside I saw a bench and began to rise toward it. Not yet, said the wheeler. As the wheelee, I was to remain seated until the car pulled up and I could get directly into it.

Thus, the responsibilities of the hospital were fulfilled, and I could be off on my own. Holding up my swollen thumb, I turned to wave goodbye.

EPILOGUE

The dumb thumb began to heal on its own.



"Snow Sand" © David Staat

2nd place - Images from Last Conference, RMOWP 2022 Contest

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Conference Choices

by Don Laine

Where are we going next year? And maybe the next few?

With apologies to Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, and the delightful Dorothy Lamour, "We're off on the Road to Morocco..."

Well, not really. But we are checking out three possible locations that are just as fascinating, all relatively small communities with plenty to see and do, and we hope, affordable lodging and meeting space. Please continue reading and then email info@rmowp.org with your thoughts. Now, in no particular order, our three possible locations.

LOS ALAMOS, NEW MEXICO

Los Alamos has a delightful variety of activities available, practically something for everyone. Top attractions include **Bandelier National Monument** with its 13th-century ancestral Puebloan ruins, including cliff dwellings, a large pueblo, and an abundance of rock art. There are also a variety of trails, including one that leads to two picturesque waterfalls. The mostly undeveloped **Valles Caldera National Preserve** is the result of a huge volcanic eruption over a million years ago. The preserve boasts herds of elk and mule deer, plus black bears and mountain lions. Miles of old logging roads - mostly closed to motorized vehicles - provide easy access to the backcountry for hikers.

Of course, Los Alamos is primarily known as the birthplace of the world's first atomic bombs, code-named the Manhattan Project. Los Alamos National Laboratory operates the **Bradbury Science Museum**, which tells the story of the development of the bomb as well as other projects, including non-military uses of nuclear energy, and the **Los Alamos History Museum** highlights the human history of the area. The **Manhattan Project National Historical Park** is a work in progress, and includes sites in Tennessee and Washington State, to tell the story of the development of the bomb.

CORTEZ, COLORADO

This is an excellent home base for seeing some of America's most impressive archeological sites, as well as a wonderful mountain drive. The main attraction here is famed **Mesa Verde National Park**, where you can explore 13th-century cliff dwellings and other archeological sites on your own or on guided tours. Nearby is **Ute Mountain Tribal Park**, which has cliff dwellings similar to Mesa Verde, plus wall paintings and ancient petroglyphs. Access to the park is

strictly limited to guided tours. **Canyons of the Ancients National Monument** contains thousands of archeological sites, including an excavated 12th-century pueblo, the remains of kivas, cliff dwellings, and sweat lodges.

Noteworthy for its 20-foot-tall sandstone towers, **Hovenweep National Monument** is about 40 miles west of Cortez along the Colorado-Utah border. The monument, once home to more than 2,500 people, actually covers six separate sites, the best preserved being the Square Tower Site in Utah, where there is a ranger station/visitor center. Cortez is also a good jumping off point for driving the spectacular **San Juan Skyway**, a 233-mile circuit through the scenic San Juan Mountains, crossing five mountain passes and passing through Durango, Silverton, and Ouray, Colorado.

KANAB, UTAH

For some of the best red rock scenery in the American West, head to southern Utah and northern Arizona, and Kanab is an ideal place to start. At least that's what Hollywood thought. Think the long-running TV show "Gunsmoke" was filmed in Dodge City, Kansas, where it supposedly took place? Nope. Just outside of Kanab. You've seen the area in numerous TV shows and movies, and remains of several movie sets are nearby, giving Kanab the moniker "Little Hollywood." Kanab's Parry Lodge, opened in 1931, was where many of the actors and film crews stayed, including John Wayne, Gregory Peck, Clint Eastwood, Frank Sinatra, Maureen O'Hara, and Roy Rogers. Movie fans will also want to drop by the open-air Little Hollywood Museum.

Nearby is the aptly-named **Coral Pink Sand Dunes State Park** and **Grand Staircase-**

Escalante National Monument. Also nearby, **Buckskin Gulch**, a slot canyon on Bureau of Land Management property, is considered one of America's best and most beautiful hikes, and one of its routes is a fairly easy walk. We would certainly want to do a day trip to the **North Rim of the Grand Canyon**, and conference attendees might want to schedule extra time for trips on their own to nearby **Bryce Canyon National Park** and **Zion National Park**. Especially scenic is **Vermilion Cliffs National Monument**, although high-clearance four-wheel-drive vehicles are needed to access much of it. Tired of rocks and old movies? **Best Friends Animal Sanctuary**, a no-kill shelter for up to 1,600 animals just outside Kanab, offers tours, where you can meet the residents of Dogtown, Catworld, Horse Haven, Parrot Garden, and Piggy Paradise.



*"Vermilion Cliffs Landforms" © Al Perry
1st place Scenics, RMOWP 2013 Contest
[Ed. Note: near Kanab, Utah]*



"Gooseberry Mesa Sunset" © Richard Youngblood
Hon. Mention - People in Nature, RMOWP 2022 Contest
[Ed. Note: Near Zion National Park]

Writer's Corner

Trust Me

By Virginia Parker Staat

"Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters."
~ Albert Einstein

After this year's RMOWP conference, David and I headed to Idaho in hopes of finding cooler climes and some wildlife to photograph. We were delighted to discover an old growth forest near Elk River. Some of those red cedars were over 3,000 years old. Camping beneath the towering giants brought back a long-forgotten memory.

In the early 90s, David and I visited the West Coast's old growth, redwood forests. We meandered through towering redwoods on soft, earthen trails. An old photo showed at least six men chaining their hands around a single tree. One redwood had even been carved out so a small car could drive through its massive trunk. I reveled in the quiet of those dense forests, the magnitude of those massive trees, the scent of the moss-laden earth. To say the least, I was smitten.

I was so enamored by the redwoods that I determined to plant one at home. In Texas. In South Texas. And I did. I ordered a redwood seedling from a catalog. When it arrived, I carefully followed the instructions and planted it in what I hoped would be an ideal spot. The poor thing didn't last through August. It was a sad lesson. Had I only taken the time to research redwoods, I would have quickly discovered my idea was doomed to fail. I would have learned that redwoods only grow in a "450-mile-long strip, stretching from southern Oregon to Salmon Creek Canyon, near Monterey," (see greenarborist.com). They simply don't grow in Texas. Not Ever. I had been carried away with the idea rather than trusting my instincts to do the needed research.

As outdoor writers, it is our job to know. We must make certain what can and cannot grow in a specific area if we

mention a plant in our essays. It is our job to research the animals we write about in our stories. Stray from the truth, and it can have disastrous consequences.

Years ago I was reading a children's book for a college literature class. It was a survival story about a boy lost in the woods. Early in the book, the narrator told about a beaver lodge he found along a steep cascade on a fast-running river. As soon as I read his description, I closed the book and never finished it. I no longer trusted the author. He had not done his homework. It was obvious that he had never seen a beaver lodge. If he had, he would have known that beavers choose still or slow-moving water for their huts, not fast-running rivers. Worst of all, not only had the author failed to do his homework, but the children who read his book were exposed to a falsehood about beavers.

Building trust in our writing begins with the fundamentals of proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Author Shirley Taylor reminds us in her article *Writing 101: Write Well If You Want To Earn Trust And Confidence*, that "paying attention to proper spelling and punctuation, correct sentence construction instead of non-sentences, and spelling out words in full instead of abbreviations only suitable for SMS" will earn trust and confidence in our work.

We further enhance reader trust when we write the truth. We don't have our protagonist flip on a light switch in a story about the Civil War. Or find snakes in Alaska. Or moose in the desert. Insufficient research and false assumptions can be lethal to our credibility and destroy the trust of our readers.

We also must throttle our emotions when writing to persuade. If our bias is too strong, it can muddle our reader's understanding of our topic. We must present an informed argument, using a respectful and reasonable analysis of an opposing view. In his book *On Writing Well*, William Zinger reminds us, "Credibility is just as fragile for a writer as for a President. Don't inflate an incident to make it more outlandish than it actually was. If the reader catches you in just one bogus statement that you are trying to pass off as true, everything you write thereafter will be suspect. It's too great a risk, and not worth taking."

It is good to be passionate about our beliefs. It is fine to have a story idea that includes places or animals that we have never seen. Our job as writers, however, is to make certain our readers can trust us by writing what is true. We build credibility with error-free grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The information we write about must be accurate. We throttle our emotions in order to present both sides of a situation fairly. Ultimately, we must do our research. Otherwise we may have a dying redwood succumbing from heat in the throws of a Texas summer... or worse, we may misinform and lose the trust of our readers. It is simply a risk not worth taking.



Kokopelli - Friend or Foe?

By Don Laine

Of the many subjects of rock art found in the American West, one claims both a name and a gender: He's **Kokopelli**, and he's been found in ruins dating as early as A.D. 200 and as late as the 16th century. The consistency of the images over a wide geographic area indicates that Kokopelli was a well-traveled and universally recognized deity. The figure is generally seen as hunchbacked and playing a flute. His image is still used by potters, weavers, and painters, as well as for decoration on jewelry and clothing. Kokopelli has never been a totally evil character, although he's frequently been a comic one, and sometimes a bit lecherous.

Until recent times, legends of Kokopelli were still current among the Pueblo peoples of the Four Corners area. Although the stories differ in detail, almost all connect Kokopelli to a fertility theme. Sometimes he's a wandering minstrel with a sack of songs on his back; other times he is greeted as a god of the harvest.

The Hopi of First Mesa in Arizona seem to identify him with an unethical guide of Spanish friars searching for the Seven Cities of Cibola in 1539. This guide was more interested in making passes at Hopi maidens than in searching for the fabled cities, according to legend, and Hopi men consequently shot him with arrows and buried him under a pile of rocks. Another Hopi village holds Kokopelli to be a sort of traveling salesman who traded deerskin shirts and moccasins for brides. Yet a third Hopi legend has him seducing the daughters of a household, and sewing shirts while his wife chased the men.

The Hopi make kachina dolls of Kokopelli and of his wife, Kokopelli-mana, both of which are sold to tourists. As is the case with most kachina dolls, the figure was represented by a real-life kachina dancer, who used to make explicit gestures to female tourists and missionaries—until the visitors found out what the gestures meant. Many early peoples welcomed Kokopelli around corn-planting time, and married women who hoped to conceive sought his blessing. Single maidens, however, fled in panic.



"Pom Pom Girl"
© Buddy Green
1st place - Novice, RMOWP
2022 Contest

Public Lands Are Calling

Saturday, September 24, is **National Public Lands Day**, with free admission to federal public lands including National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management properties, plus what is considered the nation's largest single-day volunteer effort. Established in 1994, National Public Lands Day is organized by the National Environmental Education Foundation, with volunteers participating in projects such as cleaning or rebuilding trails, painting, and construction. See www.neefusa.org/npld for planned events near you, or, organizers say, take the initiative and drop in to your favorite park or other public land and start picking up trash!



Mesa Verde National Park © 2004 Barb Laine



*Hand-painted Kokopelli fetish, Coronado Campground, Bernalillo, NM.
© 2005 Barb Laine*

Help RMOWP Grow

By Virginia Parker Staat



Virginia with her beloved Roxanne.

What a wonderful conference we had in Golden! It was great to see so many familiar faces and spend time together. We have noticed, however, a discouraging trend. Our RMOWP membership numbers are falling, mostly due to change-of-life issues. During our General Membership meeting, we discussed a variety of ways to reach out to potential new members, including recruiting local photography and writing clubs, schools, and those we meet while exploring our respective crafts.

But why should someone join RMOWP? I believe our greatest connection point is our commitment to conserving the outdoors and sharing it with others. Our annual conferences offer the opportunity to foster new friendships, share interests, and to gain appreciation for other crafts. We learn from each other by sharing talents, techniques, and styles. Our conferences take us to amazing places and offer the opportunity to view those places through the eyes of other members. These conferences also offer a venue for us to share our year's best work and to learn something new through workshops and field trips.

The bi-monthly newsletter keeps us connected with a variety of updates, opportunities, and education. Our RMOWP website pulls all these benefits together to become a launching point for us to stay connected throughout the year.

The next time you meet someone while photographing grand vistas or wildlife, why not strike up a conversation about RMOWP? When you attend a writers conference or storytelling event or notice someone scribbling notes at a picnic table, why not ask if they are interested in outdoor writing? They could become a new friend and a new member of this great organization. That's a win-win for all of us.



"Rainbow Before the Storm" © Dan Bernskoetter
2nd place - Altered/Composite, RMOWP 2022 Contest

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Let us know: info@rmowp.org

Subject: E-mail RMO

Thanks!

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