
ROCKY MOUNTAIN OUTDOORS

A Newsletter for Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers and Photographers

Send Us Your Favorite Photo!

text and photo by Executive Director and Head Honcho, Don Laine

While listening to the song "My Favorite Things" from "The Sound of Music," I had a thought — we all have a favorite photograph, sometimes more than one — so why don't we share them with our RMOWP family through the newsletter and website?

It's simple and there's just one rule — that you took the photo. It can be from any time, any subject, as long as it's yours and you're willing to give RMOWP the right to use it in the newsletter and website. And, please tell us why it's your favorite, or one of your favorites. Send one photo and a brief reason why it's your favorite to info@rmowp.org.



To get the ball rolling, I'll start with my favorite photo, taken in the Carson National Forest in northern New Mexico in 1979.

Those of you who came to the Taos conference last fall met my friend Joel, who prepared the barbecue along the Rio Grande. We were college roommates in Pennsylvania, and it was Joel who convinced me to come to New Mexico after graduation. This image shows Joel teaching his daughter Marty how to fish. Joel and his wife Marny live about a mile from me, just north of Taos, and Marty lives in Colorado Springs.

I like this photo on two levels: The people are special to me and the father-daughter bonding is tender and visible.

OK, now it's your turn. Send us your favorite.

Conference 2026 Plans in the Works

RMOWP heads to the Grand Junction, Colorado area for its 2026 conference. Details are still being worked out, according to conference organizer Steve Cochrane, but plan for it next fall. Highlights include Colorado National Monument (nps.gov/colm), Western Colorado Botanical Gardens, Grand Mesa (the world's largest flat-top mountain), the Colorado River, and of course, Palisade Vineyards and Orchards. We'll notify you when dates and other details are confirmed, and check www.rmowp.org for updates.

Join the Great Backyard Bird Count on February 13-16, 2026

Don't forget to join this year's Great Backyard Bird Count from February 13-16. The Great Backyard Bird Count is a citizen-science based count held every year in February. People from across the world can participate and observe birds that they see within their own backyard or at their favorite public spaces. All data collected from the count helps researchers learn about where birds are overwintering and how populations are doing across the U.S. and world.

Spend as little as fifteen minutes in your favorite places watching birds. Identify them, count them, and submit your counts online to help scientists better understand and protect birds around the world. Find more information on this bird count here: www.birdcount.org.



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President's Column



RMOWP President, Linda Haehnle

Happy
New
Year!!

Whew!
It's been quite
an interesting
year with all
the bumps and
challenges ...
but we made it

through 2025 and can look forward to
what 2026 brings us!

Have you ever thought about the history
of New Year's Day? Here are a few tidbits ...

- In 46 BC Julius Ceasar established January 1 as the first day of the new year in honor of Janus, the Roman God of beginnings. His two faces allowed him to look back into the past and forward into the future.
- in 1582, Pope Gregory XIII re-established January 1 as New Year's Day.
- People have been pledging to change their ways in the new year for an estimated 4,000 years, starting with the Babylonians who made promises to gain the favor of the gods and start the year off on a good foot.
- In the late 18th century, the poet Robert Burns is credited with adapting and partially rewriting *Auld Lang Syne*, whose lyrics call for remembering friends and experiences from the past.
- An estimated 1 billion people around the world watch the famous ball drop in Times Square every year!

However you celebrate this new start — with festivities of your own, culinary delights, gatherings with friends and family — may the New Year bring good health, many blessings, and fun adventures to each of you.

Cheerfully, Linda

Membership Renewal Due Soon

Membership renewals are due in January. About mid-January, treasurer Maryann Gaug will email membership renewals to everyone whose membership expired at the end of 2025.

Please remember to pay your dues promptly. If you have decided not to renew your membership, please let Maryann know so that she won't bug you in February and March. If you have a financial issue with dues, please contact Maryann. We have ways to help.

Emails will also be sent to members who paid for multiple years and to life members stating their membership is in good standing.

If you need more information, please email Maryann at megaug@earthlink.net



1st Place Member's Choice, Morning Snack, Beto Gutierrez

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2026 Conference Highlight: Historic Rim Rock Road



photo and text courtesy National Park Service

Colorado National Monument's Rim Rock Drive is one of the most spectacular drives in the United States. Redrock canyons, crisp blue skies, and verdant green juniper highlight the fantastic views along the road for motorists and bicyclists. Several overlooks give you a place to stop and take in the view. Stargazers can choose their favorite overlook and enjoy beautiful views of the night sky. [Several hiking trails](#) are located near the road for anyone wanting to stretch their legs and explore the landscape. There are [three tunnels along Rim Rock Drive](#).

Exploring the geology of the monument can easily be done from the road. You'll view rock layers dating from the 1.7 billion year old pre-Cambrian gneiss, schist, and granites at the bottom of the canyons, to the much younger sandstones and shales at the top of the road. Download a [geology tour pamphlet](#) (2.9 MB PDF) and [information about our rock layers](#) to take with you on your drive, or stop by the visitor center and pick up a copy at the front desk.

The average drive, without stops, takes 45 minutes to one hour. Plan for more time if you would like to hike, take photographs, or stop at the overlooks. There is one entrance at each end of Rim Rock Drive. The west entrance is located off of Highway 340 in Fruita, CO. This entrance is just 4 miles from the visitor center, and is the perfect place to start if you would like to see the exhibits, ask a ranger questions, or pick up a Junior Ranger activity book. The east entrance is off of Monument Road in Grand Junction CO, and is a great place to begin if you would like to start your day with a hike in the Devil's Kitchen area. [You can view a map of the park here](#).

The road is challenging, narrow, and steep in some sections with sheer dropoffs. If you are afraid of heights, some sections of Rim Rock Drive could be difficult to navigate. Driving from west to east may be a little easier, because your vehicle will be further away from the cliff edge on most parts of the road. Motorists and bicyclists share the road, so please use caution when on tight corners and hills. On the east side of the monument, motorists and cyclists may encounter large trucks that use four miles of the monument's roadway to access the community of Glade Park. In the winter, road conditions can change frequently. Check online for [current conditions](#), or [call the visitor center](#).

In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks.

~John Muir

Opening for Two Available at Santa Clara Ranch!

Santa Clara Opening for Two!



text and photo by Frank Zurey

RMOWP has an opening for two people for our trip to Santa Clara Photo Ranch, owned by members Beto and Clare Gutierrez. The original couple who signed up can't make it on these dates. Whoever requests these slots first will get them. Please email your interest in going to Santa Clara to Frank Zurey at frank@zureyphoto.com as soon as you can. Cost for the trip is \$600, including \$500 for the photo shoot from March 23-27 and \$100 for the meals. The available room has a private bath with twin beds.

We arrive on March 23, 2026. Supper will be provided that evening. We photograph on March 24, 25, 26, and 27. We leave after breakfast on March 28.

The daily schedule is as follows: Each day we will have breakfast at the ranch house dining hall and then go out to the various blinds to photograph wildlife. Back for lunch, and then go out and photograph until the light fails. Then we have supper in the ranch house and fall into bed. Repeat for three more days.

There are no refunds. If you have to cancel, and we find a replacement, the person taking your spot will reimburse you.

Additionally, we need to leave gratuity for both the cook and the ranch. The ranch gratuity contributes to the feed that attracts the birds and other animals to the ranch. Beto spends a fortune on the feed, and he isn't getting anything for our visit except to support RMOWP. We recommend a minimum of \$50 from each guest, for both the cook and the ranch.

We hope you join us. It will be a great photo opportunity and an enjoyable time with friends.



Santa Clara's comfortable dining hall, by Virginia Staat



Javelinas sparring, by David Staat



Eye-level photo blinds, by Virginia Staat

For more information, visit santaclararanch.com.

Writer's Corner

Tied Up Tightly in a Nice, Neat Little Bow

text by Virginia Parker Staat, drawing by David Staat

"There is no real ending. It's just the place where you stop the story." ~ Frank Herbert

A friend of mine spends most of her Christmas season with the Hallmark channel playing on her television. She loves the endless rotation of predictable movies. She also doesn't understand why these movies are definitely not my cup of tea.

We playfully tease one another about the never-ending, repetitive formula. Even my search engine's AI knows it: "Hallmark Christmas movies typically follow a formula that includes a strong female lead from a big city who returns to her small hometown, often encountering a local man with whom she rekindles a romance. The plots usually feature themes of love, family, and personal growth, culminating in a heartwarming ending."

Therein lies my issue with Hallmark's formula — that disgustingly sweet, heartwarming ending. The word that comes to mind is CONTRIVED.

Don't get me wrong, I like Hallmark cards and prefer stories with happy endings. But Hallmark Christmas movie endings are too happy. It seems that every ending is tied up tightly in a nice, neat little bow. Everyone lives happily ever after. Even the subplots have happy endings. No loose ends. No plot twist. No sad faces. Nothing left to the imagination. Did you know that on average, Hallmark produces FORTY of these Christmas movies each year? But I digress.

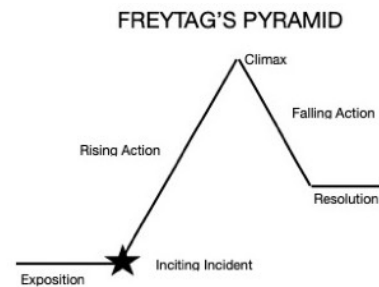
I'm not sure about your life, but mine has never had a completely happy ending with every outstanding issue resolved. Not even fairy tales have totally happy endings (after all, the evil queen always dies, which is definitely not happy for her!). Perhaps therein lies my problem with Hallmark Christmas movies. They are utterly unrealistic. And, while completely happy endings may be comforting for my friend, they aren't real. And, as writers, shouldn't we strive for REAL? But, again, I digress.

For writers, our challenge is to know when and how to end our stories. Do we tie them up tightly in nice, neat bows, or do we leave something to the imagination? For me, the difference lies between the definition of a happy ending and a satisfying ending.

It begins with understanding Freytag's Pyramid. Developed by 19th-century German writer, Gustav Freytag, his pyramid explains the satisfying structure of a story in five parts, including exposition,

rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution.

The story arc is represented by a lopsided pyramid. It is drawn with the first three parts rising to a peak, followed by a quick descent to the resolution. The drop in descent is normally severe. As a writing professor told



me, once you hit that climax, get out of the story as fast as you can. The result? A satisfying ending with loose ends.

Satisfying endings linger with your reader. They allow them to continue interacting with the story and its characters long after they have turned the last page. Think of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* and its last lines. Scarlet says, "I'll think of it all tomorrow, at Tara. I can stand it then. Tomorrow, I'll think of some way to get him back. After all, tomorrow is another day." It is a satisfying ending, but hardly tied up in a nice, neat little bow.

In my humble opinion, a satisfying ending is so much more effective than a happy ending.

Satisfying endings strive to be redemptive, hopeful, and reflective. Such is Edward Abbey's last lines in *Desert Solitaire*, "The desert will still be here in the spring. And then comes another thought. When I return will it be the same? Will I be the same? Will anything ever be quite the same again? If I return."

In *Writing About Nature*, John A. Murray suggests "closings can assume several different forms, depending on the genre: it can offer a resolution or conclusion to the storyline, it can reiterate theme, it can provide a consummation to the argument, it can establish an expanded context for the piece, it can find resonance in a quotation, seek closure with a vivid image or word picture."

Murray cautions writers with these words: "Readers are very sensitive to the closing of a narrative, and, regardless of the strength of the rest of the piece, will feel considerable disappointment if the writer fails them at this crucial moment. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that if the closing is particularly ineffective, the essay or story will not endure."

Perhaps those ineffective endings of Hallmark Christmas movies are the reason most fall into oblivion and the company must produce FORTY or more movies each year. It's just a thought. But then, again, I digress.