

The Blessing of Community



It's been an eventful month in the Four Corners, and not in a good way...La Plata County (and other places) suffered back-to-back 100-year floods, just over a week apart. The damages have been exacerbated by wildfires, even though they occurred as long ago as 2002.

Vegetation regrowth has not entirely stabilized the soils over the tens of thousands of burned acres. In addition, there are downed tree trunks and limbs that tumbled into swollen creeks and rivers,

causing log jams that dammed the water, which then spread over a wide area. This was especially true after the second, larger flood event.

The blessing is that the community has turned out to help those who lost homes and personal property, and who are still buried in mud. (Fortunately, no lives were lost, to my knowledge.) Temporary shelters were established. Churches and the soup kitchen organized volunteers (sometimes a hundred or more) to shovel and bulldoze the mud and debris. Some people with heavy equipment simply showed up and got to work.

The Durango Food Bank set up a donation center: bring household supplies, clothing, etc. This old body is not up for shoveling mud, so I donated gift cards for Home Depot and Walmart. A local restaurant raised over $20,000 for flood relief. There is still much to be done, and hopefully the feds will contribute as well.

America has this idealized “history” of rugged individualism and self-made men. It’s just a pathological myth, of course. I get especially peeved when someone uses the phrase “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” to suggest someone should help themselves and not expect aid.

It is impossible to pull yourself up by your bootstraps and only a fool would attempt it (give it a try and let me know how it goes with the levitation). That is the original meaning of the phrase. In reality, "We the People" of America have always been interdependent. We have always needed one another to rough-it through the tough times and celebrate the good ones.

Yes, the Thanksgiving story about the Pilgrims is also largely a myth, but it is true that early colonizers of this continent would have (and did) perish without the aid of the Native Americans already here. They knew the dangers, and the survival methods to live in this land.

When part of the community suffers, we should all be willing to extend a helping hand. And when we are among the suffering, offer gratitude that we are capable of banding together to move forward into a better future.

Have a Happy Thanksgiving!

Eilene

On Writing

Writing Emotion



"Emotions are abstract, and describing them is hard. But the writer must try, for an article without emotion is like a sun-bleached shirt." — Francis Flaherty *The Elements of Story*

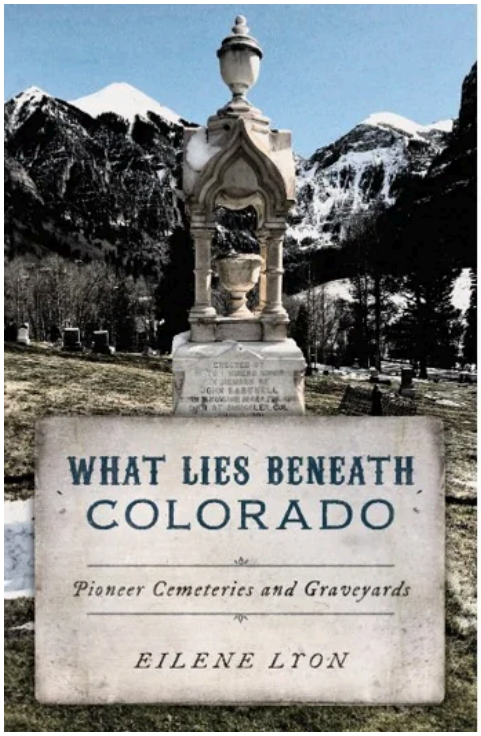
I wish I could tell you I'm good at writing emotions, but alas, I am not. Mr. Flaherty reassures me that I have plenty of company in this regard. Nothing makes writing feel flatter than reading "She felt sad" or "Anger welled up inside him." Showing emotion, rather than naming it, takes observation (of ourselves and others) and practice putting the observations into words.

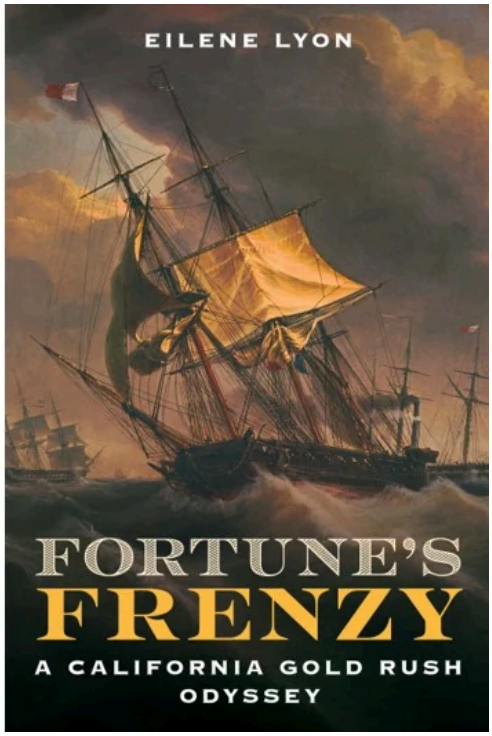
In a first-person point-of-view (POV) we can describe our inner sensations and our facial expressions or actions. To describe being startled, William Least Heat-Moon said, "I jumped and spilled coffee." A way to describe nervousness might be, "My hands shook and my

gut clenched." Or stress: "I pinched my nose, hoping to diminish the throbbing in my forehead. My shoulders tensed and rose near my ears."

In third-person POV, unless we have an omniscient narrator, we use outward physical manifestations of emotion: a reddening face, balled fists, pinched eyebrows above glaring eyes, a rising voice, a tapping foot, clasping arms around the torso, tears streaming and snot running down a face, crows feet deepening around the eyes and dimples in the cheeks.

Reviews and Event News





I will be giving a presentation on *What Lies Beneath Colorado* for the spring term of the Life Long Learning series at Fort Lewis College, Durango. I'll be sending details on the date/time in a month or two.

I've been working on some updates to my website. I'll be making additional changes and additions. Check out my new About page!

If you have an organization needing a speaker, you can learn more on the Presentations page on my website.

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The Missing Bones of Dr. Jones

While researching the gold rush story in ***Fortune's Frenzy***, I visited Hillside Cemetery in Pennville, Indiana. I found the grave of Mary Adeline Jones, daughter of my cousin, Dr. Benjamin Jones. But where was Benjamin's grave? He and another daughter died in 1864 and

should be buried nearby, but Mary's headstone sat alone in a large expanse of grass.

I hired a team from Ball State University to map the area around her grave using ground-penetrating radar to determine if there were unmarked graves.

My story about the results was published in March 2025 in the *Indiana Genealogist* (a quarterly publication of the Indiana Genealogical Society). It won an IGS Genealogical Writing Award earlier this year.

See the PDF of "The Missing Bones of Dr. Jones"



Still Kicking

I keep fresh flowers from my garden in a small vase on my bathroom vanity as the seasons permit. These are the blanket flowers in my backyard on November 17. Normal? Not! And they weren't the only flowers still going strong. The alyssum that refused to do anything all summer finally took off. I even had fresh lettuce! Crazy weather.

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