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August/September 2020

## Something Bigger

As an avid hiker and cyclist, what is it as a writer that I like so much about these pastimes? I get outside, out of my rut, out of my head, outta town. I feel part of something bigger, something magnificent, ungraspable.



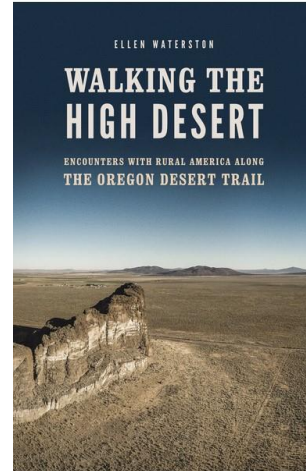
As a writer, I often struggle with not only how daunting the blank page is, but also the terrible existential question: what's the point? Do my words matter? What can I possibly write that matters? That question is a coyote, a trickster. It skews the fragile creative process, the experience of writing for the sake of it. The minute I "aim to please," the writing becomes self-conscious, audience-driven, rather than author-and-inspiration-driven; it becomes soft in the middle, loses its emotional and creative urgency. Conversely, when the creative impulse is in the driver's seat and I, as the writer, along for the ride, obedient to what insists on being written, I am reminded that I am part of something bigger, and so is the reader. This is important.

— Ellen Waterston, Founder, Writing Ranch

# Walking the High Desert - What Readers Have to Say

When readers get what you are trying to say, it is the best kind of review of all. These just in:

"Rarely have I read a book in life that so completely crossed lines and embraced everyone. It's unusual for the spiritual truths of life to be spoken of so obliquely and profoundly at the same time. There is so much great writing in here and such a deep understanding of the oneness of all people..." — Carter Lord



"Your work is sassy, serious and sublime, all at the same time. It is that perfect blend of knowledge, love, and research. I am so grateful to you for the trek through the desert I'll never make myself." — Ruth Norman

"Your book is uplifting in so many ways, encouraging in these times when it seems such negativity seems to reign. In the desert you so appreciate, beauty is often hidden from superficial glance. Likewise, imaginative solutions for all those who use the land will not come from first-glance efforts. You've shown how it can happen." — Pam Bodie

## What can I do?

Roald Dahl said, "Somewhere inside of all of us is the power to change the world." So let's get out the vote! Don't just stand there, take a stand, "make a hand," as cowboys are fond of saying when urging a fellow buckaroo to get to work.

## Monthly Prompt

Replace every word in a poem with a different word of similar meaning. Read both versions out loud three consecutive times. Reflect on word choice, cadence, assonance and consonance. Former US Poet Laureate Ted Kooser once remarked that writing a seven-line poem could require as many as 800 word choice decisions.

### In A Landscape Live Concerts Resume!



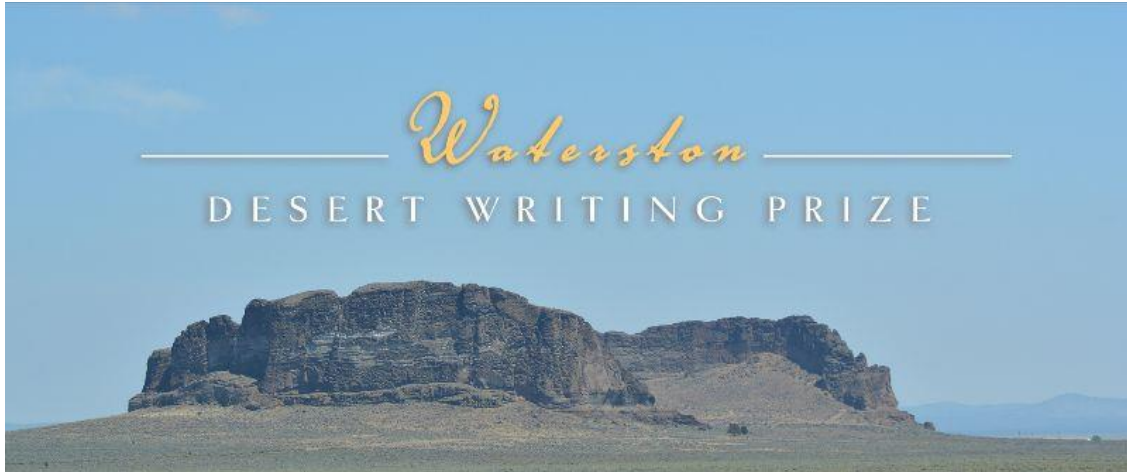
Live concerts are resuming! In A Landscape: Classical Music in the Wild features classical pianist Hunter Noack in an outdoor concert series set in the stunning landscapes of the high desert and the Pacific Northwest. For information visit

[www.inalandscape.org](http://www.inalandscape.org).

*Ellen Waterston reads from Walking the High Desert as part of an August 8, 2020 live concert at PLAYA, Summer Lake, Oregon*

## Still Virtual After All These Months: Mark Your Calendar!

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## 2020 Award Ceremony

Thursday, September 17, 2020. 6:30 p.m. (Note date and time change)  
Hosted by the High Desert Museum

Join us virtually for the sixth annual awards ceremony of the Waterston Desert Writing Prize, honoring nonfiction book proposals that illustrate artistic excellence, sensitivity to place and desert literacy. Featured will be readings by two finalists, Eli Beck, Salt Lake City, Utah and Leath Tonino, Ferrisburgh, Vermont; the winner of the inaugural student prize, Al Lehto, Bend, Oregon; and the 2020 overall winner Hannah Hindley, Tucson, Arizona. The evening will conclude with an exciting announcement regarding 2021 Prize developments and growth plans from the Waterston Desert Writing Prize and the High Desert Museum.

FREE but registration is required. This is a virtual event, and an email with login instructions will be sent the day of the event by 12:00 pm.

[RSVP High Desert Museum Calendar](#)

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## The Nature of Isolation

Ellen Waterston's poem, "Looking for God in All the Wrong Places," will be included in an upcoming online anthology. The Spring Creek Project for Ideas, Nature and the Written Word at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon has assembled a collection of writing and visual art that "explore home ecosystems and reflect on the nature of isolation during

the pandemic." The exhibit and anthology will be shared in a series of Zoom events throughout the month of October. A link to the online Zoom events will soon be available at [www.liberalarts.oregonstate.edu](http://www.liberalarts.oregonstate.edu).

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## "Mosaic: Piecing Things Together in Life and Writing" Women Writing the West 26th Annual Conference October 15-18, 2020



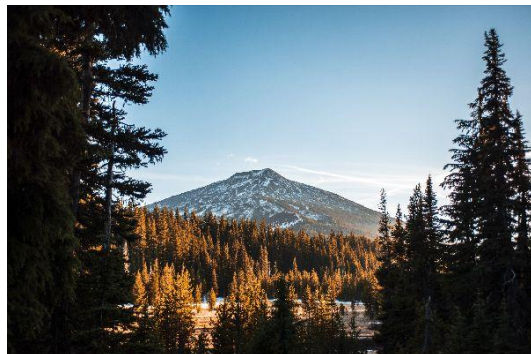
Check out the exciting conference schedule at [www.womenwritingthewest.org](http://www.womenwritingthewest.org) and enjoy from the comfort of your own home! Join me in "Mosaic: Piecing Things Together in Life and Writing," on Friday, October 16 from 3 to 4 p.m. In this session we'll experiment with the elasticity and dynamism that this lyric style of writing encourages in poetry and prose. Together, we'll examine examples of the "mosaic" by well-known authors as an effective way to achieve heightened impact in one's writing. [Click here to register.](#)

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## Together Again! 2020 In-Person Workshops



"Finding Solid Ground"  
Yamsi Ranch Writing Intensive



Mapping Memoir: A Writing Intensive  
December 4-5, 2020

September 24-27, 2020

Poet and author Ellen Waterston and guest presenters will lead a generative workshop addressing who, what and why as, after months of incubation, hibernation and contemplation, we return to a world of more activity. Established and emerging writers will leave the retreat with renewed commitment and inspiration. The retreat, held at the Yamsi Ranch on the Williamson River, is limited to 10 to ensure a Covid-safe setting. Only two spaces left! For registration, please visit [www.writingranch.com](http://www.writingranch.com).

Have a memoir in mind or one started? Enroll in the Writing Ranch's "The Story You Came To Tell," December 4-5, in Bend, Oregon to stake out your ideas and create a road map for your story. Benefit from exercises and craft talks that will hone your memoir-writing skills. Workshop sessions will be held at the Sunrise Village clubhouse, located on a ponderosa pine-covered ridge with beautiful views of the Cascades, a peaceful location perfect for a two-day intensive retreat. Visit [www.writingranch.com](http://www.writingranch.com) to register.

## Thank You Sitka!

Thank you to the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology, Neskowin, Oregon for hosting the August 17 virtual reading of *Walking the High Desert*, and to all who tuned in. Visit [www.sitkacenter.org](http://www.sitkacenter.org) to learn more about this wonderful organization.

## COVID-19 Special Discounts

Visit the [Writing Ranch website](http://www.writingranch.com) for special offers on Manuscript Lab and one-on-ones.

## Poem of the Month

It's meteor shower time!

### **Perseid**

by

Ellen Waterston

In the summer-hot pitch



## About Ellen Waterston

*Walking the High Desert, Encounters with Rural America Along the Oregon Desert Trail*, is Waterston's third nonfiction title. She has also published four collections of poetry. Waterston founded the Writing Ranch in 2000 to support the craft and careers of writers through workshops and retreats. She is founder and president of the [Waterston Desert Writing Prize](#).

For more information about Ellen Waterston, the Writing Ranch or the Waterston Desert Writing Prize, visit [writingranch.com](http://writingranch.com). email [info@writingranch.com](mailto:info@writingranch.com) or call 541.480.3933.

of the night-charred  
prairie the cowhand stood  
solo, lonely

for her, his head lolled back,  
mouth open like a diner  
creamier, eyes thrown  
up to heaven.

He trolled back eternity  
to spot the spectacular  
gaseous shatter of high  
diving meteors from some

other consideration, whose  
magnetic sling unwisely shot  
them into earth's incompatible  
breath  
to be incinerated without trace.

He hurried inside and calculated  
the years of light left him based  
on his current latitude. He hesitated,  
but not long, picked up the phone

and dialed by heart.

*Between Desert Seasons*  
Wordcraft of Oregon  
[Order here](#)



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