

# Celebrating deserts, literature in Central Oregon

By **Katy Yoder**  
Correspondent

Waterston Desert Writing Prize-winner Nathaniel Brodie of Portland was honored last week for his writing on deserts. Yet he still finds it hard to articulate just what deserts mean to him.

“The desert means a series of thing you can’t put into words. It’s a series of child-like colors, images, emotions and smells that well up out of the wide open sky,” he told *The Nugget*. “The sound of a canyon wren pulls forth feelings and memories. Staring up at a billion stars while lying on a warm flat rock... it’s at the deepest most primal connection.”

The High Desert Museum was the venue for the 5th annual Waterston Desert Writing Prize, which included workshops and an awards ceremony on June 26. Attendees enjoyed a reception before opening remarks by the High Desert Museum’s Executive Director Dana Whitelaw.

Waterston Desert Writing Prize president and founder, Ellen Waterston, followed with introductions for a three-panel presentation she moderated called “A Desert Conversation.” Panelists included scholars Bruce Berger, Patty Limerick and Kim Stafford. Waterston described the forum as an exchange between three illustrious authors and scholars, who in their work in some shape and form address deserts.

She asked each to first comment on the role the desert plays in the human narrative or in their writing, and

then to offer a short reading of their work. The discussion began with award-winning author Bruce Berger, best known for a series of books exploring the intersections of nature and culture. His most recent book, “A Desert Harvest,” was featured in an opening video created on the occasion of the recent launch of the book in New York. The video was narrated by Ellen Waterston’s brother Sam Waterston.

Berger was followed by Patty Limerick, the faculty director and chairman of the board of the Center of the American West at the University of Colorado, where she is a professor of history. She is best known for her work, “The Legacy of Conquest,” as well as a witty sense of humor that kept the audience laughing and listening to her intriguing desert descriptions.

Asked before her time on stage about participating in the event, Limerick complimented all the writers who vied for the coveted prize.

“I get to recognize younger, talented writers and introduce them. It’s so excellent to be in the company of the talented young. I get to be an ancient figure who wrote about deserts long before some of these young folks were born,” she said.

Rounding out the thoughtful discussions, Oregon’s Poet Laureate, Kim Stafford, read a recently written work inspired by his admiration for Ellen Waterston and his love for all things desert. He described his reading as, “Not really a poem but more back and forth between a charm,



PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

Nathaniel Brodie, 2019 winner of the Waterston Desert Writing Prize, offered an engaging reading to an audience at the High Desert Museum.

a blessing, a memory and a message to my late brother.” Stafford recalled that his late father, William Stafford, loved to take road trips from Portland.

“He’d say, let’s get over the mountains to the dry country,” said Stafford.

After the panel, Limerick did the award presentation to finalist, Summer Hess and the winner, Nathaniel Brodie. Brodie was overwhelmed by the beauty of the High Desert Museum and the honor of meeting Patricia Limerick, who he considers one of his heroes. He was also excited to have his book sitting on the same table with esteemed writers like Kim Stafford and Bruce Berger.

Dana Whitelaw made her closing remarks, thanking

attendees and Ellen Waterston for her tireless efforts in the literary arts.

“The Waterston Desert Writing Prize is one of my favorite events to host because of the partnership and Ellie’s vision for the writing prize,” she said at the conclusion of the evening. “I love that it uses the literary arts as a way to explore deserts differently. It pushes our definition of deserts. It could be the Sonoran desert, the high desert, the deserts of depression or the moon. Using the desert as a prompt for writing allows readers to think about it differently.”

For more information about The Waterston Desert Writing Prize visit <https://www.waterstondesertwriting-prize.org>.

## SEED TO TABLE: Children’s programs connect them to food

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activities. Exploration and learning on Seed to Table farm allows students to connect with nutrition, science, and art through farm-based activities.

For three hours each Tuesday throughout the summer, Seed to Table staff is here to help kids create positive relations with nutritious foods and to foster experiential education. The three hours includes a break in between to head over to the neighboring park to play and eat a snack the group has prepared.

The entire family is welcome to join for the entire time or for the first hour-and-a-half, from 9 to 10:30 a.m. Participants learn about our native pollinators, dig for worms, make a seed collage, prepare a delicious fresh garden snack, and more. No registration is required. If you are dropping your child off there is a minimum age of 5 years old. If parents are staying all ages are welcome.

Visit Seed to Table’s website [www.seedtotable.oregon.org](http://www.seedtotable.oregon.org) for more information or contact Education Coordinator Aude Girin at [education@seedtotable.sisters.org](mailto:education@seedtotable.sisters.org).

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