

A HUMBLE THANK YOU TO A GIFTED WRITER

BY KELSEA HARRIS-CAPUANO | MISSOULA, MONTANA

As a Christmas gift last year, I recieved Barry Lopez's book "Horizon." I excitedly read the first 40 or so pages, became distracted by life and promptly forgot to keep reading. Lopez passed nearly a year after I started reading his latest book. And his passing left me deeply saddened. The world has lost a curious, eloquent and lyrical writer. "Writer", of course, does not encapsulate all that Lopez was. He was a world traveler, a storyteller, nature enthusiast, a deep thinker, an explorer of human culture and writing was his medium, a way to connect everything together and share it with the world.

It wasn't until I started graduate school in 2019 that I was introduced to the writings of John Muir, Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold and other iconic naturalist writers. I picked up Lopez's "Of Wolves and Men," and it mesmerized me. The book, published in 1979, detailed the complicated relationship between the apex predator and humans.

I had only been living out west for a few years, so the well-known conflict between wolves and western communities was relatively new to me. And the book, published four decades before I read it, was still relevant and exacting in its descriptions of this ongoing conflict tied up in history, culture and politics. And striking to me were Lopez's true efforts to understand the complexity of such an issue. He wrote from a variety of perspectives and had a way of tying people to landscape, constantly bridging humanity and the environment. "Nature writer" falls

well short of describing his deep exploration of life's meaning through other cultures, animals, landscapes and stories. I was hooked on Lopez.

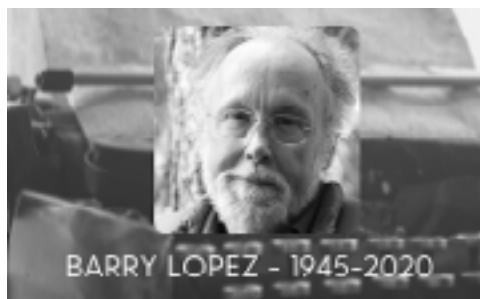
After Lopez's death, I immediately searched for "Horizon," intent on finishing the book I had started and abandoned. As an autobiographical work in which Lopez reflects back on his lifetime of journeys, it is a wonderful last piece of work to leave his audience. Out of the more than 70 countries he traveled to, he wrote about six places that strongly influenced his understanding of the world. His ability to synthesize such experiences through story and personal narrative, as only a writer like Lopez could, feels like a gift.

"We, all of us, look back over our lives, trying to make sense of what happened, to see what enduring threads might be there. My further desire in planning this book was to create a narrative that would engage a reader intent on discovering a trajectory in his or her own life, a coherent and meaningful story, at a time in our cultural and biological history when it has become an attractive option to lose faith in the meaning of our lives. At a time when many see little more on a horizon but the suggestion of a dark future."

- Excerpt from "Horizon" by Barry Lopez

I can't say I've read all of Lopez's work, or that I knew him personally or that I can speak with real authority about him. But I can say I am one of the many readers and aspiring writers that he has deeply impacted. To be a writer is to be vulnerable, and Lopez made the choice over and over to share himself with the world through writing. That's both a goal worth striving for and something worth celebrating.

— Kelsea Harris-Capuno is a writer, outdoor adventurer, educator and OWAA journalism intern.



"In a half-century of travel to 80 countries that generated nearly a score of nonfiction and fiction works, including volumes of essays and short stories, Mr. Lopez embraced landscapes and literature with humanitarian, environmental and spiritual sensibilities that some critics likened to those of Thoreau and John Muir." — The New York Times