



# Your favorite travel photo could snag you a cool \$200

## Deadline is April 10 for photo contest

The annual “Way to Go” photography contest, sponsored by *Grand Times*, Leader Publications’ magazine for seniors, is officially underway.

Jefferson County readers age 50 and older are invited to send in their favorite travel or vacation photographs. One lucky winner, drawn at random from all eligible entries, will take home \$200.

The April 18 issue of *Grand Times* – which will include information about the De Soto Senior Expo on Wednesday, April 24, at the Knights of Columbus Hall on Hwy. E – will include as many entries as space allows.

Last year, Judy Colombini, 77, of Fenton won the grand prize with her photograph of a peaceful mountain stream surrounded by evergreen trees during a misty morning in Glacier National Park in Montana in 2013.

Her photo was selected at random from among more than 100 entries that came from photographers around the county, from veteran shooters to photo newbies.

“We like to day hike, so we were taking one of the trails and came around a bend and saw this. I immediately said, ‘That’s a picture!’”

Colombini has been taking pictures since getting her first camera at about age 13. Now retired, she devotes a lot of time to the hobby, and belongs to both the Jefferson County Photography Club and MONEP (Missouri Nature and Environ-

mental Photography).

She said her focus has always been on nature photography, which dovetails nicely with her interest in travel.

“When (nature photography) has been your major focus for years, it drives you to get out to these places,” she said.

Colombini said she shifted to digital photography about 10 years ago, and it’s not unusual for her to return from a trip with more than 1,000 images. “It’s fun to go through them, pick out the best ones and end up with a handful of the best,” she said.

The deadline to submit an entry for the contest is 5 p.m. Wednesday, April 10.

Anyone who entered the contest in previous years is welcome to enter again, but please submit photos from a different vacation for the 2019 contest.

Entries should include the following information:

- Photographer’s name, age, address and phone number.

- The date and place the photo was taken and by whom.

- The names of any people in the photo.

Photos can date back to the reader’s childhood or be as recent as last week. Please write a brief note on why the trip was memorable.

There is a limit of two entries per person, and only Jefferson County residents are eligible for the prize.

Send entries to: Way to Go, Leader Publications, P.O. Box 159, Festus, 63028. Photos may also be dropped off at the Leader office at 503 N. Second St., Festus, or e-mailed to [nvrweakly@aol.com](mailto:nvrweakly@aol.com).

For more information about the contest or about the De Soto Senior Expo, call the Leader at 636-931-7560.

## Author: Sirois’ book reaches No. 1 Bestseller status on Amazon website

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another series after I finish the trilogy,” he said. “I have a kids’ book in development, and I have another series of YA fiction in mind. I see myself continuing writing, and – God willing the books catch the attention of the right people – getting them adapted into films or miniseries.”

Sirois’ agent, Amy Brewer with the Metamorphosis Literary Agency, signed him last year after reading his first book.

“I had met him in May 2018 at a Missouri Writers Guild conference,” she said. “I read ‘From Parts Unknown’ and was intrigued. We thought he had great potential as a writer.”

But it’s Sirois’ promotional savvy, Brewer says, that is his advantage.

“He’s so good at communication and promotion,” she said. “Being a writer today is 50 percent writing and 50 percent business. You have to create a social media platform, maintain a readership. Publishers don’t promote the way they used to. It’s an ever-changing industry, and he’s changed along with it.”

### Author

Sirois grew up in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., and earned a bachelor’s degree in theater arts from Marymount Manhattan College. He worked on an assortment of projects – short stories, one-act plays, screenplays – that didn’t pan out before turning to longer-form writing in the early 2000s.

His first book, “From Parts Unknown,” went through several iterations on its way to publication.

“It started as a video game proposal; then it was a script, and it ended up being a novel,” he said. “It combines science fiction and pro wrestling and was inspired by the 1975 movie, ‘Rollerball.’”

He self-published the story in 2002, but sales stalled.

“Once my friends and family bought all they were going to, it just pretty much died.”

He got back the publishing rights to the book in 2011, and turned it into a five-part serial.

Sirois went to work in 2004 for the pop culture website 411Mania.com, and spent the next eight years writing weekly movie news reports and opinion columns.

It was during that time he wrote the first draft of his novel, “Excelsior,” based on a character he created in high school. After working with an editor for almost two years, he self-published it in 2010, and it was picked up by a small press based in the Midwest.

The book did fairly well, and the sequel, “Ever Upward,” was published in 2018. The set got an unexpected but welcome boost from Amazon.

“In December, I took part in a promotion called ‘book bomb’ that alerts readers when a specific book is on sale for a short time,” Sirois said. “‘Excelsior’ wound up getting enough sales to reach best-seller status.”

“It was cool to go to the Amazon page and see the ‘No. 1 Bestseller’ ribbon.”

The book is now stocked in Barnes and Noble stores and is available online.

“I even got a staff recommendation for it,” Sirois said. “That was cool.”

### Narrator

Sirois and his wife, Cheryl, a St. Louis County native, moved from New York to Imperial in 2011. They welcomed a daughter in late 2017.

Cheryl is an administrative assistant at St. Louis University, and Sirois works part time at Barnes and Noble’s West County Center store, as well as works as a freelance audiobook narrator out of Clayton Studios on Big Bend, where he learned the craft.

“I did some narrating for some of my author friends,” he said. “That’s how I paid for lessons there (at Clayton Studios). I worked with a radio commercial veteran named Jim Singer. He taught me about what words to emphasize, how to



Cheryl Follmer-Sirois photo

### George Sirois works as a freelance audiobook narrator.

get comfy behind the mic.”

His first professional narrating work was his own book series.

“I did an audition for (the publisher) by recording the first chapter,” he said. “I got the green light and did the whole series. That got me more audiobook work.”

He has narrated novels, children’s books and short stories, as well as internal business presentations, PowerPoint slides and other projects. He works out of a home studio.

### Podcaster

Sirois joined the Missouri Writers Guild shortly after moving here and served a term as its president. He is preparing to launch a new podcast venture with current St. Louis Writers Guild president and fellow author David Alan Lucas of Kirkwood.

“I had been doing a podcast network called Write Pack Radio, similar to TV shows like ‘Donnybrook’ on TV,” Lucas said. “It was a panel discussion about the writing industry, exploring all the things that go into getting your stuff published.”

Sirois joined the network in October 2018 with his own podcast, called *Excelsior Journeys*, interviewing people who work in creative fields – writers, filmmakers, dancers, artists.

“When David announced he was ending Write Pack, he and I decided to

merge his show and mine,” Sirois said.

The two are preparing to launch their new podcast network, called *Winding Trails Media*.

“We’re going to hold a virtual launch party on Facebook on Saturday, May 4,” Sirois said. “The official launch is Sunday, May 5.”

“People can download an app called Podbeam, but you don’t have to,” Lucas said. “You could listen through an iPhone or Android phone. We’re redoing the website ([windingtrailsmidia.com](http://windingtrailsmidia.com)) and there will be a link from there to the actual podcasts.”

Both Sirois and Lucas say the trend toward internet-equipped vehicles has made podcasts popular.

“It opens up a world of opportunity for people like us,” Lucas said. “The big corporations are becoming less of a gatekeeper for content. Say I approach KMOX, for example, and say I want to do new versions of old classic radio shows like ‘The Shadow.’ They’re going to say there’s no audience for it, or there’s no money in it. But in podcast form, it’s easy to do and relatively cheap.”

Sirois said podcasts are perfect for commuters.

“A novel takes six hours to listen to, but a podcast runs 30-45 minutes or so,” he said.

Sirois is looking forward to whatever the future brings.

“The fact that I can call myself an ‘International Best Seller’ is cool,” he said. “But the fun part is what happens next. There’s so much more to do for myself and my family. I’d love to teach – that’s something I think I’d like to pursue.”

He doesn’t yet make a living off his writing and performing, but it gives him “a good supplemental income.”

“It’s every writer’s dream to walk away from the day job and write full time,” he said. “There are signs that, if I just keep plugging along, that could be in my future. It’s something that’s still a dream for me.”