

THE CHAPARRALIAN

August 31, 2011

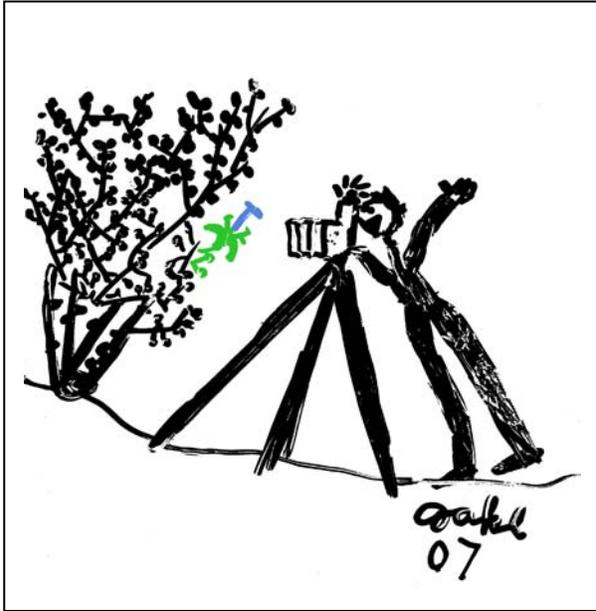
Volume 8, Issue 2



The Chaparralian #39

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The Chaparralian is the quarterly journal of the California Chaparral Institute, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is dedicated to the preservation of native shrubland ecosystems and supporting the creative spirit as inspired by the natural environment. To join the Institute and receive *The Chaparralian*, please visit our website or fill out and mail in the slip below. We welcome unsolicited submissions to *The Chaparralian*. Please send to: rwh@californiachaparral.org or via post to the address below.

You can find us on the web at www.californiachaparral.org

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Cover photograph: An old-growth big-berry manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glauca*) approximately 110 years old that was killed in the 2007 Witch Creek Fire. Fellow Chaparralian Jim Chialtas ponders a stump section cut from another old manzanita nearby. On the lower right is a two-year-old manzanita seedling, representing the next generation.

Upper left: Taking photos of the chaparral for a future photo essay project. Art by Jake Halsey.

All photos by Richard Halsey unless indicated otherwise.

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NASCENT THOUGHTS

A number of readers have wondered about the story in our previous issue, *Been Dead for Awhile, Part I*. The presence of *Part II* this time around should answer some of the questions we have received. I hope Jim, Cody, Van, and the characters in their lives will be able to pass along something of value as they struggle to deal with challenges so many of us face, especially those who hope to make the world a better place by standing up for what is right.

Several weekends ago I visited the remains of the old Marshal South home in the Anza-Borrego Desert. It's one of those places I go when I need to shake out my neurons and lay them in the sun and open air. I always take a good friend with me, a friend who has history, to assist in the process.

Despite pleas to reconsider, I turned off my cell phone Friday afternoon and left it on the kitchen counter. It was a redeeming experience. My friend Rudy didn't have to take such protective measures, however. He doesn't have a cell phone, nor does he care to participate in the great internet devolution of email and instant access to information. "I'll look it up in a book later... if people want me, they can leave a message on my home message machine. I'll get back to them, eventually."

After stocking up our ice chest with the appropriate beverages and some food, we headed out to the desert. Upon arrival, we put up our portable canopy, brought out our chairs, sat down next to our ice chest, and talked. We did climb Ghost Mountain on Saturday to visit Marshal's place, but mostly we sat and talked in our chairs. Friendship is being able to talk with someone for three days straight and discover the universe anew.

Finding kindred spirits to share our hopes and dreams with is an essential part of maintaining those hopes and dreams. Be it by raising a family on a lonely mountain in the desert, as was the case for South, or developing close friendships with those who have shared life-changing

experiences with us, the actualization of our dreams and who we become is deeply influenced by who we choose to be with.

Surround yourself with those who fuel your dreams.

Photos are often much more meaningful if they are allowed to speak for themselves. So enjoy the photo essay in this issue that focuses on old-growth chaparral and some of the wonderful people who enjoy it. You may even recognize a few. However, knowing some of you would like additional info, from top left, clockwise:

Page 6: Burton Mesa, near Lompoc, CA. *Ceanothus* burls in the Los Padres National Forest behind Santa Barbara, CA. Three rocks suspended near the old *ceanothus* burls.

Page 7: Manzanita near Medford, Oregon. Famous big-cone Douglas fir dendrochronologist Keith Lombardo in his Tucson, AZ lab. Old-growth mission manzanita near Mission Trails Regional Park, San Diego, CA. Popular San Diego naturalist Bill Howell standing next to an old red shanks near Anza Valley, CA. Ranger Kerry Uglik with manzanita in the Palomar Ranger District of the Cleveland National Forest.

Page 8: Happy fire ecologists Marti Witter and Robert Taylor in the Santa Monica Mountains. Talented musician and actor Ryan Donowho surrounded by chaparral and bay trees above Painted Cave, Santa Barbara, CA. Son Jake and friend Trevor with manzanita near Santa Ysabel, CA.

Page 9: Praying for no fire among red shanks chaparral, near the Santa Rosa Mountains, CA. Celebrating the loss of chaparral to produce more deer to shoot, Cleveland National Forest, CA.

Page 10: The legacy of past logging, Idyllwild, CA. Famous native plant landscaper and wise man Greg Rubin, Indian Flats, Cleveland National Forest, CA.

Arcto Avenger

By Roger Klemm

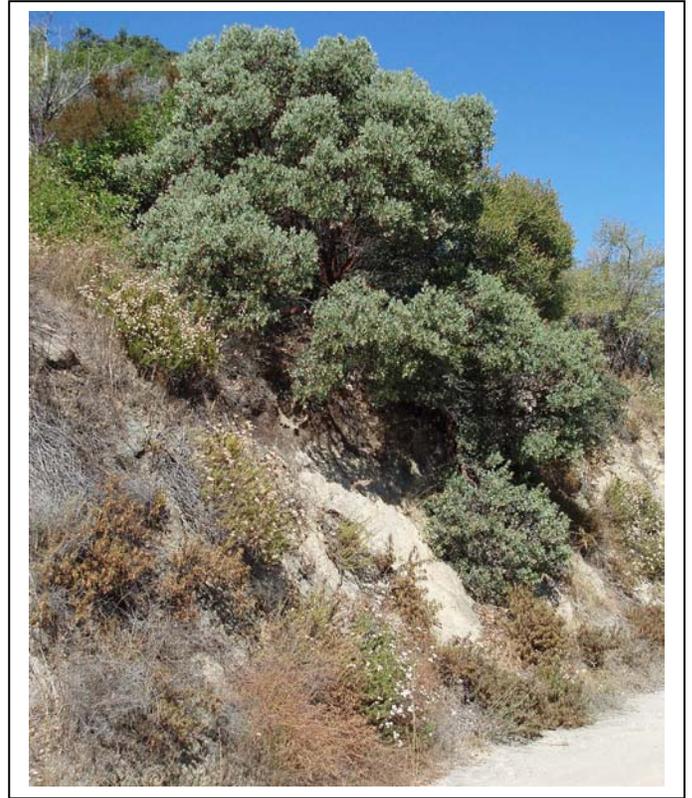
I've been gardening with native plants for about 20 years now, landscaped two yards, gotten a grant to plant native trees in a community park, and planted native plants at the campus where I work ("guerrilla gardening" I call it). I gather acorns (mostly from the Engelmann Oaks that grow at and near where I work) and grow them to plant the seedlings back where they came from. My work with the oaks has earned me the nickname "Roger Acorn" from Kathy, my native plant buddy.

A couple of months after the 2009 Station Fire in the Angeles National Forest, I had the great fortune to attend a lecture by the complementary team of Jon Keeley and Rick Halsey, describing how the chaparral responds to fire and how the Southern California National Forests should be more appropriately named, as they are mostly chaparral, not forest. At the lecture, I picked up a copy of Halsey's book, *Fire, Chaparral, and Survival in Southern California*. Over the course of the next several weeks I read the book cover to cover. My love for chaparral and the big, native shrubs found there was renewed!

While I live not far from the Station Fire scar (at one point I could see the fire from my backyard), I also live near the Verdugo Hills, which contain some of the most beautiful, mature, mixed chaparral stands in Southern California. As I hiked and biked through the Verdugos, I began to notice one of Halsey's favorite plants, big-berry manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glauca*). It grew on me, and has become my favorite as well. I decided I had to try propagating it so I could enjoy it in my own yard as well as establishing a protected population in case the chaparral in the Verdugos needed to be restored in the future.

I gathered some seeds and exposed them to smoke, but only two germinated. Unfortunately, both seedlings died within a couple of weeks, possibly from being overwatered. I wasn't sure how they needed to be treated in pots. It's easy to kill native plants with kindness. I'd asked a couple of nursery professionals about propagating manzanitas, but they wouldn't talk about it – trade secrets, I guess.

I went back to my archive of *Growing Native* (www.growingnative.com), an interesting newsletter



A parent plant. Photos by Roger Klemm

that was published by Louise Lacey in the 1990's, and found two articles about propagating manzanitas – one about how to grow them from seed, and another on how to grow them from cuttings. Later that summer, using the second article as my guide, I took cuttings from several of the manzanita plants in the Verdugo Hills. Yes, August doesn't seem like the right time to be taking cuttings, but that's what the article recommended, so I tried it.

My propagation setup was decidedly low-tech – a few 6 inch pots, my own ad-hoc potting mix that was almost exclusively sand and perlite, with a tiny bit of native soil I'd gathered from underneath the parent plants, and a makeshift tent to give the cuttings a little extra humidity. I dipped the cut ends of the stems in rooting hormone (a very old bottle of

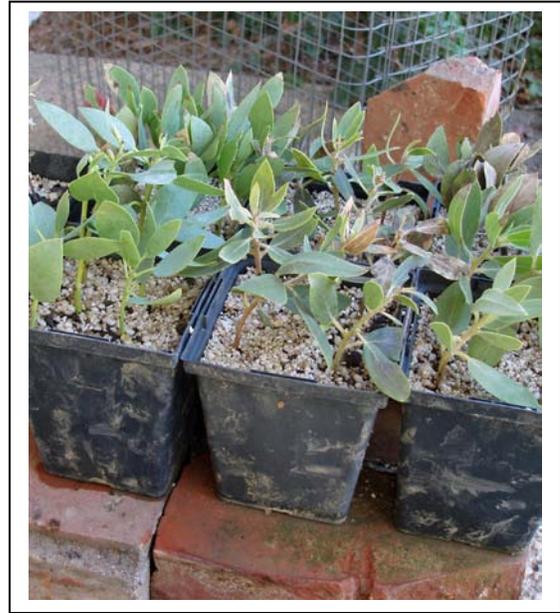
Rootone F powder) and put several cuttings in each pot, as the article recommended. I spritzed them with a spray bottle each morning, and watered the soil every couple of days (they were in complete shade, under the eaves on the north side of the house). Amazingly enough, some of the cuttings actually lived! In hindsight, I think the tent was unnecessary, and possibly detrimental. Again, I was killing them with kindness – they wanted fresh air, not extra humidity!

By the time it started raining in October, I'd had enough of the silly tent, so I just left the cuttings uncovered, and those that were still alive at that point didn't seem to mind being exposed to the fresh air. In November, some of the buds in the leaf nodes were swelling, so I separated the cuttings into their own pots. None of them had any roots, which amazed me – how can these cuttings look so healthy in the open air, with absolutely no roots?! I kept the soil moist throughout the winter, but didn't bother giving them any extra humidity.

Then, in March, I started to see more swelling in the buds in the leaf nodes. By April, some of the cuttings started to show a few leaves, and in late April I planted two of the rooted stems in my yard. In early May I planted another. Yes, they took their sweet time, but they did actually have roots! Out of a total of about 30 cuttings I took from 6 different parent plants, I've obtained four strong plants, and another couple of cuttings that may yet decide to grow. Not a great success ratio, but considering this was my first time growing what some consider a difficult plant, every one that makes it is a good thing!

The article I was using as a guide recommends re-potting the cuttings in one-gallon containers at this point and adding some fertilizer, as that will encourage the young manzanita plants to grow over the summer to a more vigorous size if the intent is to sell them during the traditional native plant sales come fall. In my case, I'm planting them in my yard. I'm not interested in instant gratification. I planted them directly into their permanent homes without fertilizer. The other place I'm trying to use them is at work with my guerrilla gardening project. Big-berry manzanita is supposed to be pretty deer-proof and very tough. However, there's a captive herd of deer on the campus. The lush growth that comes with fertilizer and water is very tasty to deer, so I'm not going to tempt fate by fertilizing them there either.

For this summer's batch of cuttings, I have my eyes on a few new plants. One of them is growing on a southwest-facing slope, in a very hot, dry, exposed location – now that's got to be one tough individual! There also appear



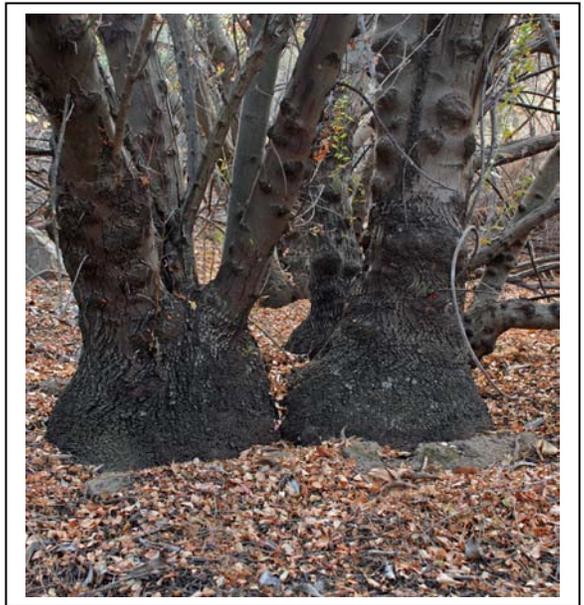
to be two forms of another species, Eastwood manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glandulosa*), growing along the trail in the Verdugo Hills that I'd like to try and propagate: an upright form and a lower, prostrate version. Hopefully I'll be able to repeat my previous success.

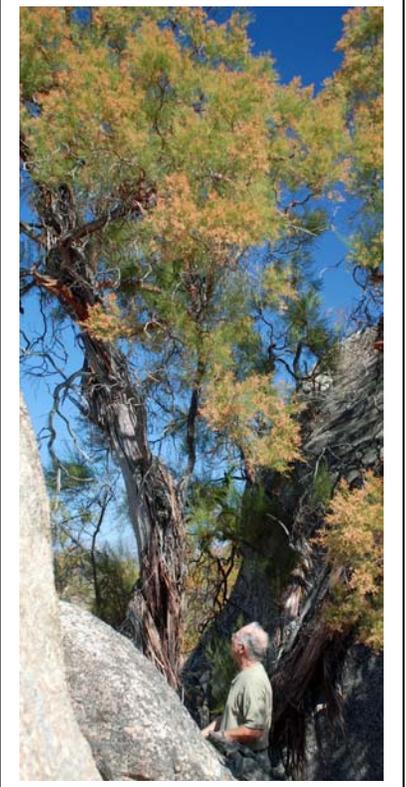
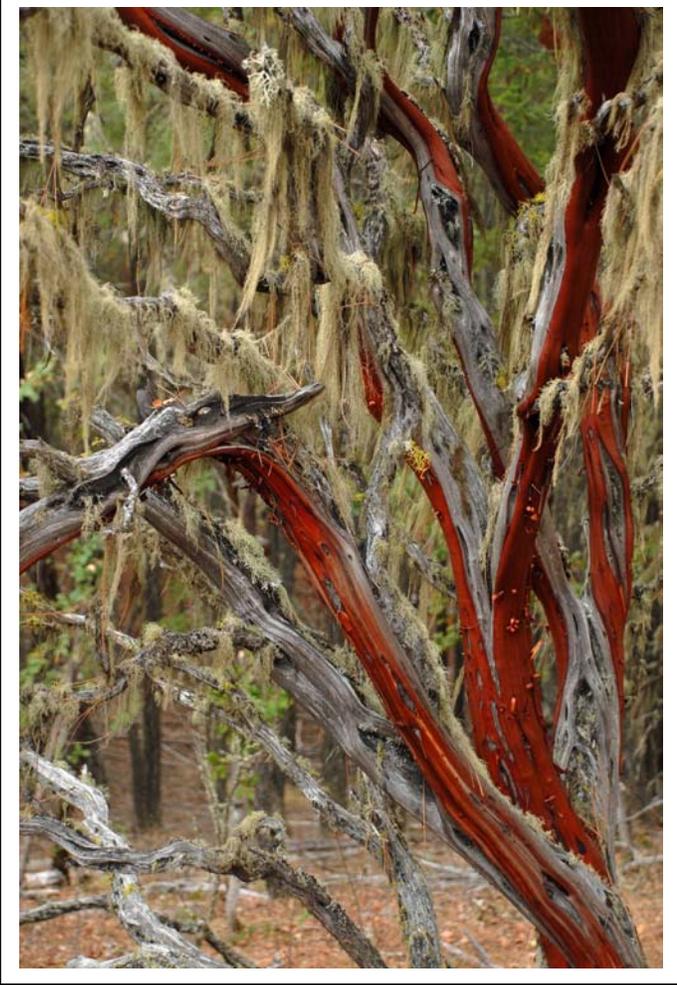
The chaparral in the Verdugo Hills has become a magical place for me, partially because of the manzanitas I discovered there, but also because their vigorous presence indicates a healthy chaparral ecosystem. And due to my new awareness, every time I visit the Verdugo's to get my "chaparral fix," I see more manzanitas than I did the time before.

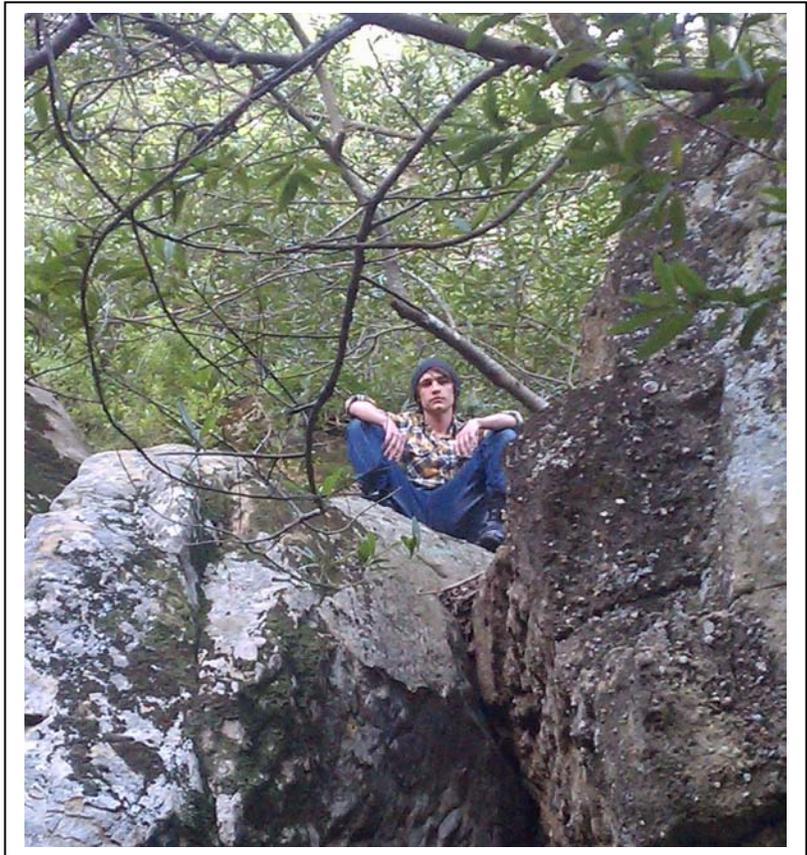


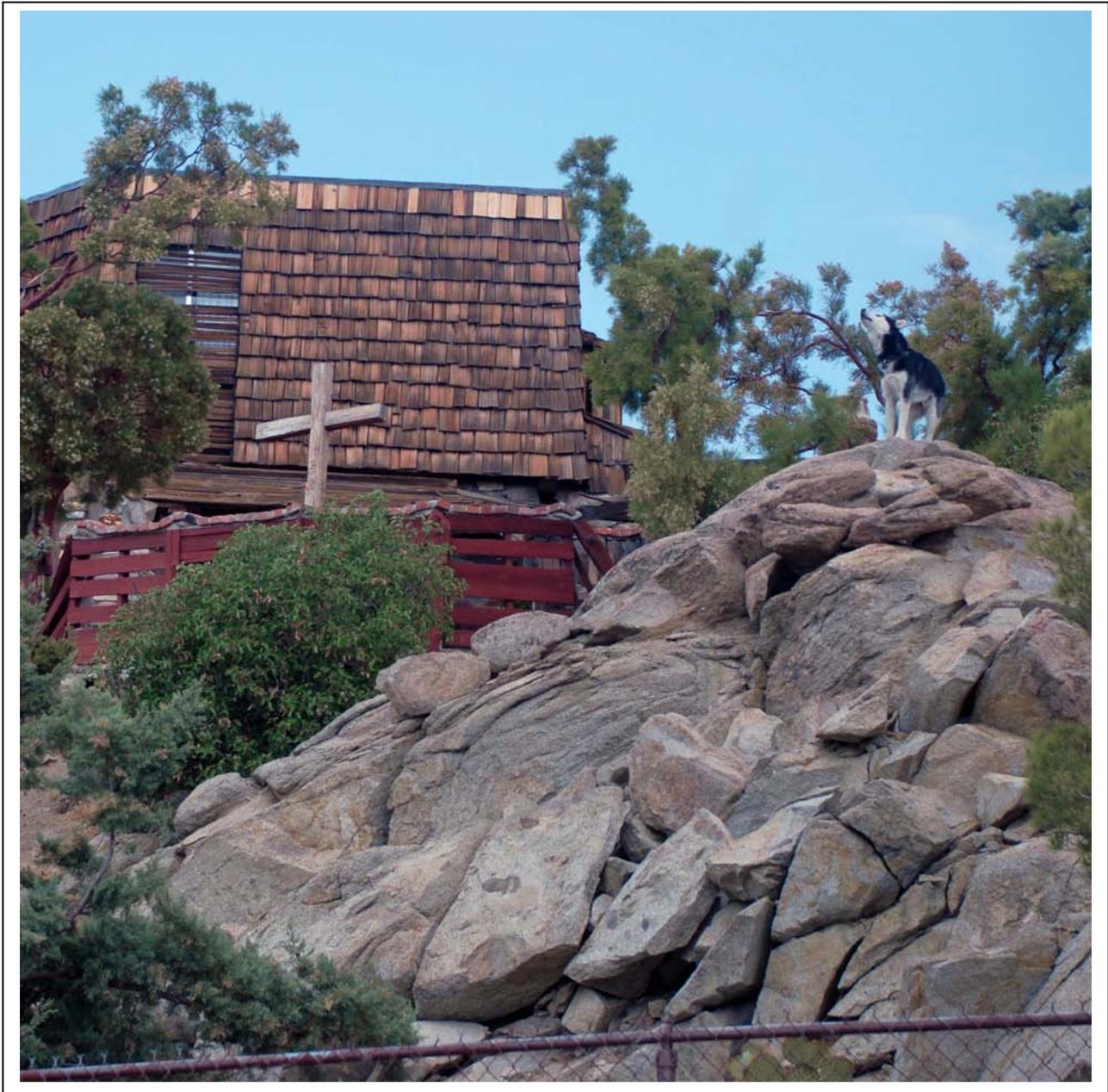
Old-Growth Chaparral

A photo essay











Been Dead for Awhile

By Richard Halsey

Part II

Rocks pounding against others, generating sparks while cascading down the granite slope. The campsite threatened with complete obliteration. He started to run, but couldn't move. The aroma of coffee began coloring the sky with soft hues. He heard whispers in the deep canyon below. His left leg dropped off the edge of the couch.

"Mornin' Jim!" Robinson said. "Let myself in and brought ya some coffee."

"No. More sleep."

"It's eleven-thirty." Get your ass up and I'll make ya some oatmeal."

Robinson was Hart's greybeard, a fountain of wisdom and perspectives shaped by 74 years of doing art. His voice was gentle, his eyes steel blue. He's was married to one of Hart's former colleagues who continually encouraged his predilection towards radical behavior. She was one of the few he still cared to talk with.

Hart made a couple more protests, and then dragged himself into the small bathroom, a classic space of necessity from the early 1900s. The bathroom's sink was a thick porcelain slab supported by two chrome legs. Two overused toothbrushes and a half-rolled tube of Tom's Toothpaste sat on the edge. The faucet worked well enough. A light reddish stain formed around the drain from the ancient algal life forms that thrived there and the accumulated minerals deposited by the steady drip. The toilet was connected to the wall by a thick chrome pipe. On the white tile floor was a square of cedar slats forming a small raised mat for wet feet exiting the curtained shower-tub. A used bar of boutique soap created a faint scent of peace in the small room. Several high-end shampoos lined the tub's wall. A little window with frosted, textured glass provided morning light. Hart lifted it open, turned, entered the shower, pulled the curtain closed, and then twisted on the two valves with just the right balance of hot and cold. Steam quickly filled the room.

Robinson opened the bathroom door and set the coffee he brought on the edge of the sink. "Here's your coffee. Don't knock it over."

"You're a pal, Robinson."

Steel cut oats simmered in the cast-iron pot. Robinson dropped in dried apricots, cherries, and cranberries, along with some brown sugar. Eighteen minutes to simmering perfection.

Hart walked into the kitchen, shirtless, buttoning his Levi's as his plaid boxers tried to make an escape over the pant's waistband. With the refrigerator, stove, and table filling the room, it was difficult for two people to be there without bumping into each other.

"Sit down before you break something," Robinson said. "You forgot your coffee. I'll get it."

Hart took a few bites of oatmeal, a sip of coffee, and smiled. "We should get married, Robinson."

"Too late. Already taken," Robinson replied with a feigned sense of disappointment in his voice. "So how goes it? Haven't talked to ya in awhile."

"Hard to say. Writing's going well. Roommate's workin' out. People are generally a pain in the ass as usual. I've always been a closet recluse anyway, so I guess that's all workin' out the way it should."

"You don't fool me a bit, Hart. You're a social animal. A schizophrenic one, maybe, but you still love to put it out there."

Hart focused on his oatmeal. "Good stuff, Robinson."

"You're one of the scribblers, you know."

"What?"

"The way I've always figured it, there are two basic kinds of people. Those who are feverishly experiencing life, scribbling down what they see as

quickly as they can, crinkling their notes up, and tossing them over their shoulders... and those who are picking up everything the few have recorded and trying to understand what they've found. Some get it. Most don't and end up throwing down the notes in frustration, dismissing it all as the ramblings of a fool.

"It can be music, writing, a painting, a poem, an equation, a scientific theory, whatever. Doesn't matter what the hell it is. It's all pure art. The problem the scribblers have -- the problem you have Hart -- is that they can be held back by the temptation to conform, the need to be accepted, the desire to facilitate change, to influence. If you get too wound up in that, in trying to drag the others along with you, all you end up doing is getting frustrated yourself and scaring the hell out of everyone else."

"We're all scared, Robinson."

"Yeah, but no one's more scared than someone who's convinced they're not and then's reminded they really are. People are afraid to let go of their basic assumptions about life, Hart, because they fear there may not be another limb to hang on to. So they persist, persist in thinking and doing what they've become comfortable with all their lives. Then people like you come along."

Hart manipulated several cranberries so they were included in the next spoonful. "Wanting to be part of a group, part of something, is a pretty powerful draw, Robinson. Break out from the herd and you'll get picked off by the lions."

"Yeah, but what a glorious death."

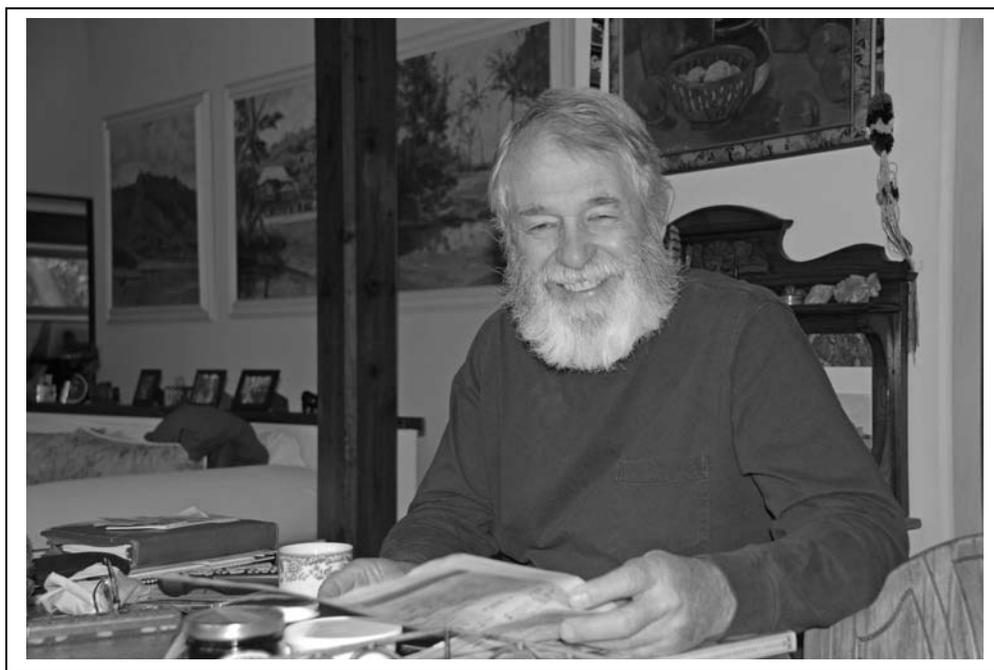
Hart snorted, a combination of a nose blow and a growl, and took another spoonful of oatmeal.

The two men focused in silence on the sweetness of the fruit and the sensual texture of the grain, completing the conversation in a way words never could. It was no different from what had happened for thousands of years. Over a hearth, on the savanna, at the wooden breakfast table, a strategic bond cemented through ritual eating, breaking of bread, sharing of resources. No need to mention it, both understood the process, respecting the tradition of validating a relationship by engaging in the most basic of biological needs, consuming food. Together.

"You done?" Robinson asked, nodding at Hart's empty bowl.

Hart nodded back.

Robinson took the bowls, leaned back in his chair, and



dropped them into the sink. “It’s lonely, this scribbler business.”

“Don’t I know that,” Hart replied back. “In the Forest Service, education system, Cub Scouts, whatever. You stand up for something, you question authority, you promote a new idea. All sorts of people urge you on, encourage you in private, but when it really matters, when you need help, you’re standing bare-ass, naked, in front of the damn firing squad.”

“The artist’s cross to bear.”

“Don’t start getting religious on me, Robinson.”

“Not. It’s about Spartacus. And you’d better damn well know I’d be hangin’ right there next to you tacked to my own cross, telling jokes till the end.”

Hart cracked a smile. Then his lower lip pushed upward. His chin wrinkled. “Yeah, I know.”

“All right man, gotta go,” Robinson said while rising out of his chair. After picking up his coffee cup and drinking what was left, he stopped in the kitchen doorway and

turned. “When you’re out front, Hart, and you’re tryin’ to drag people along, you can only go as far as they’ll let you. At some point, it’s OK to cut ‘em loose so you can move on.”

Hart leaned back in his chair, ran his fingers through his hair, and let out a long sigh. “Yeah. See ya later.”

Robinson picked up his keys from the ledge of the opening that connected the kitchen with the rest of the apartment. “Let’s go on a hike next week sometime.”

“OK. Give me a call.” Hart stayed at the table until he heard his friend drive away.

The upstairs neighbor made the ceiling squeak, the hum of the city slipped quietly under the door, and the refrigerator buzzed. Hart pulled an apple out of the bowl on the table and headed out the back door down into the small canyon below his apartment. It was overcast, so remnants of morning still hung to the leaves of the shrubs: dew drops of manzanita, ceanothus, chamise.



He walked along the trail he had cut through the vegetation into an enclosed canopy of old-growth scrub oak: dark, hidden, secret. The ground was soft like a silken carpet, plush deep with decades' worth of small oak leaves slowly decomposing on their own time schedule. Slow. Hart sat down on the duff, mixed with collections of lichens and moss, and finished his apple.

A few spider webs clung to his naked back as did the remains of yesterday's spider lunch. His mind wandered, skipping between melancholy, memories, and new subjects to write about. He liked to do that. Find a place alone, to think, to scribble.

He lay back for a moment to feel the oaken life on his flesh, then rose up, removed the rest of his clothing and lay back down. He adjusted his position to limit the soft prickling of the earthen bed, moving to the left to avoid a small rock. He closed his eyes. A leaf or something from above fell on his chest. He let it lie there without looking, trying to imagine what it was. It wiggled a bit, and then moved in a definite direction, slowly at first, then picking up speed as it headed down his torso.

The air was still, moist. The vegetation and canyon depths quieted the wind, allowing the scents of loneliness and sage to intermingle, diluting each other until they were one and the same. Hart opened his eyes just slightly. Dusty strands, like sphenes floating on molten rock, came into sharp focus and merged with the variegated canopy above; snakes in the trees. The more Hart shifted his eyes to follow them, the faster they disappeared. He stopped trying.

With time, the raw earth can penetrate the skin, the mind, he thought. Tendrils of connections wind their way through the imagination until one can feel the dirt, the granite bedrock, and continental movements on the other side of the planet.

Suddenly, he felt the slightest of nips near his loins; the wandering arthropod had found its spot. Hart bolted up. "Jeees-us!"

Cody was in the kitchen fumbling with the small coffee maker when Hart came back. "Hey," Cody said while tilting his chin up slightly. It was one-thirty.

"Hey."

Hart washed his face in the bathroom, put on a T-shirt that was slung over the couch arm, and sat down on a small stool facing the opening to the kitchen.

"You look like shit," Cody said.

"Sorting my brains out in the canyon."

Cody moved the oatmeal-encrusted bowls to the side of the sink.

"Robinson came over this morning," Hart said. "Made me breakfast." Hart stumbled over some of what he and Robinson had discussed, unable, unwilling, to describe much of the detail. "So I figure that's why you and I've connected. We're both out there, taking risks no one in their right mind would even consider."

Hart paused for a moment, waiting for acknowledgement. "I think we need each other, buddy... to keep ourselves from being consumed by the loneliness of it all."

Cody finished preparing the coffee pot and walked into the bathroom to brush his teeth.

Hart got up, walked to the double French doors, and lifted the shades. He stood there for awhile, staring down into the canyon below. "Well, what do you think about all that?" he asked as his roommate left the bathroom and moved toward the kitchen again.

"Coffee."

Van shut the door to her classroom and walked to her Jeep. The sides were splattered with mud from the previous week's geology excursion into the desert. Her grandfather's WWII military service side arm, .38 cal., was under the driver's seat, attached to the seat post by the clip on its holster. Loaded.

She threw her backpack onto the back bench seat, on top of a set of ungraded papers sprawled from one side to the other. "Evolution of the Horse." "The Behavior of Shorebirds." "Why Trapdoor Spiders are Trapdoor Spiders."

The cell phone rang. "Hey... Yeah, the party was OK. Most everyone from school was there, the walking dead from the district office, some corporate types... Yeah, he was there too..."

The conversation went on a bit longer, then Van hung up, dropped the phone into the front compartment of her pack, started the Jeep, and let the wheels spin out for a few seconds on the gravel and dirt road before lunging forward.

To be continued