

THE CHAPARRALIAN

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The Chaparralian #31

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Cover photograph: The volcanic mosaic and chaparral of Pinnacles National Park.

All other photos by Richard W. Halsey unless indicated.

The Chaparralian is the quarterly journal of the California Chaparral Institute, a non-profit organization that is dedicated to the preservation of native shrubland ecosystems and promoting an appreciation for the natural environment through science and education. To join the Institute and receive The Chaparralian, please fill out and mail in the slip below or join on our website. We welcome unsolicited submissions to The Chaparralian. Please send for writer's guidelines to rwh@californiachaparral.org or mail to the address below. You can find us on the web at www.californiachaparral.org

Editor and Publisher.....Richard W. Halsey

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NASCENT THOUGHTS

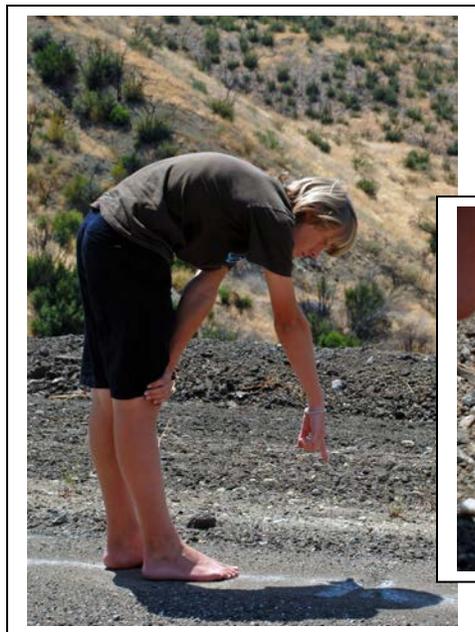
Naturalistic Intelligence

Why do some people suffer at the sight of a dead animal on the side of the road, while others fail to take notice? Where does the love of nature come from? Why do some kids collect rocks and butterflies? Is there a genetic predisposition to notice wild things, or is it merely a byproduct of hanging around tree hugging parents and friends?

For parents who have raised several children, the answers to such questions are obvious; some kids are just born nature lovers. They have an innately high “naturalistic intelligence,” a term coined by Howard Gardner in the mid-1990’s, which is characterized by an acute awareness of natural patterns, ability to notice changes in the environment others miss, and heightened sensory skills.

Being around someone with high naturalistic intelligence can sometimes be a humbling experience. It makes you realize how much of the natural world you are actually missing.

On the way home from a recent trip to Pinnacles National Monument in central California (a place of chaparral and condors), my sons and I decided to take a break from the



tension of Interstate 5 and travelled along a portion of the old Ridge Route through the Tejon Pass. Although our twenty mile-an-hour leisurely pace allowed us to enjoy the scenery, I wasn’t prepared for Jake’s ability to notice *every* living thing – including a small, white, fuzzy velvet ant strolling between the tiny pebbles on the edge of the old asphalt road.

Jake yelled, “Stop!” (which we quickly did) and then popped out of the truck to examine his new friend.

If there was ever an insect camouflaged to blend into the pavement, this was it. Our older son Nicholas and I couldn’t even see the little beastie until we almost stepped on it (for more on this fascinating insect, see Bill Howell’s essay on page 11).

O.K, so Jake saw this creature from 20 feet away while moving 20 mph in a truck? He says the velvet ant gets some of the credit because she was moving. Hmm... yeah, just like the bobcat he discovered while the critter was pretending to be a dead shrub on a far away hillside at Pinnacles or the horned lizard he saw from the truck when he was 11 years old.

While not all of us are fortunate enough to have such keen eyes, by definition we Chaparralians do have unusually high naturalistic IQs. But what do we do for folks who have either lost theirs through neglect or never had much in the first place? It’s simple. We can become their mentors by sharing our own passion for that part of the natural world we love, be it plants, animals, rocks, or whatever. The story on page 4 describes the

impact a mentor can have on a boy some of you may recognize. The story also demonstrates why nature education and volunteer opportunities organized by local Audubon chapters and other conservation groups can be so influential. They are the crucibles for creating future Chaparralians.

The Wisdom of Sunflowers

By Richard W. Halsey

Sixteen-year-old Jimmy Hart peddled down Spring Street on his way to the El Dorado Nature Center, the wild portion of a series of parks along the San Gabriel River in Long Beach, California. The Nature Center was a suburban version of New York City's Central Park. With several man-made hills and two small lakes connected by a meandering stream, the eighty-acre parcel attempted to duplicate the area's more natural side, before streets and houses.

Jimmy's ten-speed bike, bought from his brother for ninety-eight dollars, became his mobile field station; insect collecting supplies and camera gear were precariously strapped onto a metal bookrack perched over the rear tire; binoculars, note pad, identification books and lunch were stuffed into the front basket.

Fred Dayka, a retired doctor who lived across the street from the boy's family, introduced Jimmy to the Nature Center. An immigrant from Hungary, Fred spoke with a deep Bela Lugosian accent, each sentence ending as if it was drifting off into the mist. Jimmy liked to spend afternoons after school watching the old man work in his darkroom developing prints of birds and flowers under the mysterious red glow of the lab's safety light. "De camera trains your eyes to see," Fred liked to remind Jimmy. "It lets you see 'de patterns and shapes where others do not."

The Nature Center was also the monthly meeting place for the local Audubon Society. Every third Thursday of the month, members would come together and listen to speakers talk about local as well as exotic natural history adventures. Fred thought Jimmy would enjoy coming along, so he invited him to go one night.

It was dusk when the gray-haired gentleman and his energetic young friend

arrived at the center's parking lot. As they walked toward the main building along a path covered with mulched leaves and wood chips, a chorus of frogs kept them company. Fog suspended quietly over the surrounding fields and ponds in thin, wispy layers. The musky smell of moist humus mixed with the sharp fragrance of mint. Jimmy took a deep breath.

"You smell 'dat?" Fred asked. "Dat is 'de sagebrush. It defines 'de California sage scrub community." He picked off a small twig from a nearby plant and rubbed it between his fingers. "Smell 'dis Jimmy."

Jimmy jerked his head back. "Whoa! Vicks VapoRub!"

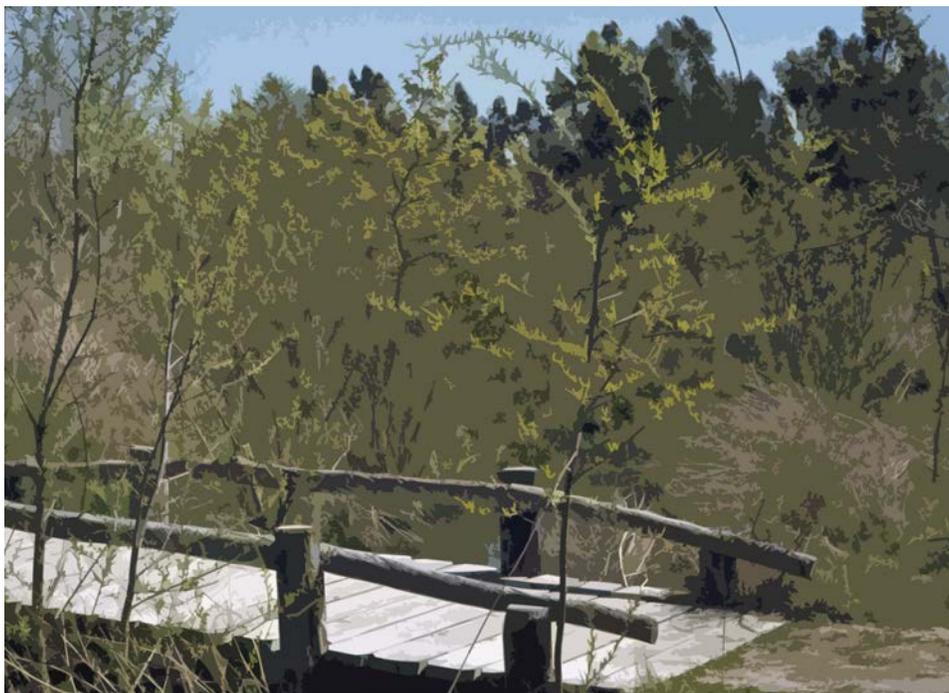
"'Tis 'de oils in 'de plant. Many smell like 'dat here. Unfortunately, it's called sagebrush. A completely inaccurate name because it isn't a sage a'tall, but a sunflower." Fred picked another small sprig and handed it to Jimmy. "Put 'dis in your pocket."

"De camera trains your eyes to see," Fred liked to remind Jimmy. "It lets you see 'de patterns and shapes where others do not."

As they began crossing the footbridge over the pond surrounding the Nature Center's main building, the chorus of lovesick frogs suddenly stopped as if someone flipped off the switch.

"Wow. That's so cool!" Jimmy said, peering over the handrail into the water's inky depths.

The Audubon meeting began with a few short announcements including one about volunteer opportunities for trail naturalists. Fred leaned over and told Jimmy he should sign up.



“Dat would be vonderful for you.”

The featured speaker described his trip to the Galapagos Islands. After two full carousels holding 80 slides each, the lights flicked on and everyone clapped. Jimmy’s eyes snapped open. Fred jerked his head upward, looked confused, then smiled to no one in particular.

“Did you enjoy ‘dat?”

“Oh, yeah. Really.”

At the meeting’s conclusion, Jimmy weaved his way to the volunteer naturalist table, grabbing a few homemade cookies on the way. “Is this where I sign up to volunteer?”

“Yes, young man!” a short, gray-haired lady answered as Jimmy stuffed in another cookie. “Sign right here.” As the boy scribbled his name and phone number, the lady and her table partner whispered back and forth.

“I bet your mother is very proud of you,” one of ladies finally gushed.

“And you’re so tall,” her friend added.

“Would you like another cookie young man?”

Jimmy tried to respond politely without crumbs falling out of his mouth. “Oh, no thank you ‘ma’ am, but thanks a lot anyway. Really.”

Fred gestured from across the room that

it was time to go.

“Well, I have to go now. Bye,” Jimmy said.

“See you on the trail!” the ladies said in unison, smiling broadly.

The boy turned and waved good-bye again, feeling a bit guilty over his feeling of relief for the timely rescue. He really didn’t mind the attention, but was finding it difficult to know what to say.

Re-crossing the footbridge on their way back to the car, Jimmy remembered the amphibian choir. “The

frogs aren’t singing anymore. That was so weird how they stopped before.”

Fred wrinkled his face as he always did when he felt words were being used incorrectly. “Weird? No, no, no. ‘De frogs are not weird. Weird’ is ‘de human point of view, Jimmy.”

“Oh...” Jimmy quietly responded; a bit taken aback by Fred’s rejection of his choice of words.

“Nature finds ways to use what ‘de environment has to offer. All ‘de species have ‘dar own way to survive. If ‘dey have what ‘dey need, ‘dey go on. If ‘dey don’t, ‘dey die.”

“Survival of the fittest?” Jimmy questioned.

“Survival of the fitter, Jimmy. ‘Dar’s always room for improvement. ‘De changing environment makes sure of ‘dat. It’s why evolution goes on.”

Leaving the parking lot, Fred’s cream-colored, 1965 Chrysler sedan floated through intermittent banks of mist like a phantom ocean liner gliding silently over a darkened sea covered by clouds of fog. Jimmy stared out the side window, watching droplets of moisture race across the outside mirror.

“Do you still have ‘de sagebrush in your pocket, Jimmy?”

Jimmy pulled out the little bundle of stems with their clusters of tiny flower heads from his pocket. "Right here."

"Squeeze 'de little flower heads between your fingers."



"Whoa! Look at that!"

"'De little spikes you see coming up, each is a separate flower. 'Dat's 'de way all flowers are in 'de sunflower family; clusters of separate flowers all bundled up in a single unit. One is actually many. Nature is full of surprises. You just have to look."

Seventeen Years Later...

"Fred? Fred, it's me Jim."

Fred stared into the empty space around him.

Jim reached out and touched his old friend's hand.

Fred slowly looked up, finally making

conscious contact with Jim's eyes. "Ohhh..." He raised Jim's hand with a firm, but fragile grip and kissed it. His eyes began to fill with water.

"How are you Fred?" Jim's throat swelled as he fought back his own tears while kneeling down beside Fred's wheelchair. "How are you?" Jim repeated.

The room was confining. The emotion did not belong there.

"Would you like to go outside?"

Fred nodded yes.

Jim pushed the wheelchair out into the hallway and past the orderly's desk, waiting for the door lock to buzz for their escape into the courtyard beyond. The doors looked like they belonged to a bank vault.

Jim stopped the chair beside a raised bed of daisy-like gazanias, glowing yellow and orange in the afternoon sun, and pushed down the wheel lock on Fred's chair.

"It's a beautiful day out here."

Fred said nothing. He just sat there with a quiet expression.

Jim started rambling on about what he had been doing, how his new teaching career was going, how life was for him.

"Teaching is hard sometimes," he said with a pause, "but I really love it."

Fred quietly turned his head toward the gazanias. "Jimmy," he said with surprising force, "do you remember about 'de sunflowers? Take one. Take one."

Jim was shocked by Fred's sudden alertness, but after a brief pause, he reached down and picked one of the flowers and handed it to his friend. Fred took the blossom and gently spun it between his fingertips like a little parasol. "Dis is not a single flower, you know Jimmy. It's a bouquet. Have I shown 'dat to you before, Jimmy?"

"Yes, they're beautiful Fred."

With trembling fingers, Fred began to pick off the petal-like ray flowers that surrounded the gazania's central core. "You know dees are not petals Jimmy, but independent flowers in themselves." After removing most of the outer ring of color, Fred tried to squeeze the black, central core of the gazania, but his fingers

were too frail. He held it out to Jim. "Squeeze it 'dare."

As Jim pressured the flower head, the center parts pushed up like dozens of miniature jack-in-the-boxes.

"You see 'dare? 'Dare? You see? Each of 'dem is a single entity. A single disc flower. 'Dey are all collected together 'dare in 'de center, like a bouquet. One is actually many."

Fred reached out and touched the mangled flower head in Jim's hand, his pale fingers quivering slightly as they sorted through the little, separate flowers. "And 'de colored petals on the outside of 'de sunflower are not petals at all, but separate flowers 'demselves. 'Dey are 'de ray flowers. Look."

Fred then pulled off one of the remaining ray flowers and handed it to Jim.

"You see 'dare! You can see it even has its own tiny flower parts."

Yes, like a bouquet! Jim thought to himself, suddenly remembering the lesson given so long ago. "Yes, Fred, like a bouquet! I remember that now. I remember. You were always pulling flowers apart at the Nature Center."

Jim smiled. A grin appeared on Fred's face.

"T'was a wonderful place Jimmy."

Memories raced through Jim's mind – the long bike ride, hunting butterflies, watching birds, taking photographs, walking nature trails, helping others to see; memories bouncing around in a chain reaction; a time when it was easy to find time.

"I'll never forget that first night you took me," Jim quietly remembered. "It was so fun to spend weekends there, watching birds, teaching visitors. I was really proud of that volunteer naturalist badge I had."

Fred grew silent after awhile and Jim continued talking a bit longer, but eventually found it difficult to know what else to say. The sun was getting a bit warm. Small beads of sweat began forming on Fred's forehead. Jim reached down and wiped his friend's brow.

"We should be going back in Fred."

Through the buzzing door and past the orderly, Jim wheeled his friend into the dining commons, hoping to find someone to leave him with instead of a lonely room. Fred's eyes stared forward,





emotionless, as both were confronted with the drone of television noise and the shine of linoleum floors.

“Fred, I have to be going now,” Jim said, kneeling beside the chair, touching his friend’s folded hands - fragile, almost transparent.

Jim started to rise when Fred suddenly turned his head up and looked at him. His hands gripped Jim’s with surprising strength and pulled the younger man toward him. Fred’s steel, blue eyes stared straight into his young friend’s eyes.

“Jimmy, don’t forget to teach ‘de children about nature,” he pleaded. “Teach them to see, Jimmy.”

Fred’s hands suddenly let go, exhausted. Jim held tight.

Closing his eyes, Jim leaned over until his forehead touched his friend’s soft gray hair and whispered “I will Fred. I will.”

One is actually many.



Nature as Inspiration

Contributions from Fellow Chaparralians



The Limpopo River forms the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe. It is a land of baobabs, mopane and mild winters. An awareness of the bushveld began here when I was nine, after our family moved to the area. Wild animals were still found on the farms. Returning home from outings over weekends, we would watch for kudu, duiker or small animals, usually when their eyes shone in the lights of the car. Most of the roads were dirt, and there were a number of baobabs in various parts of the town, including one outside the classroom window.

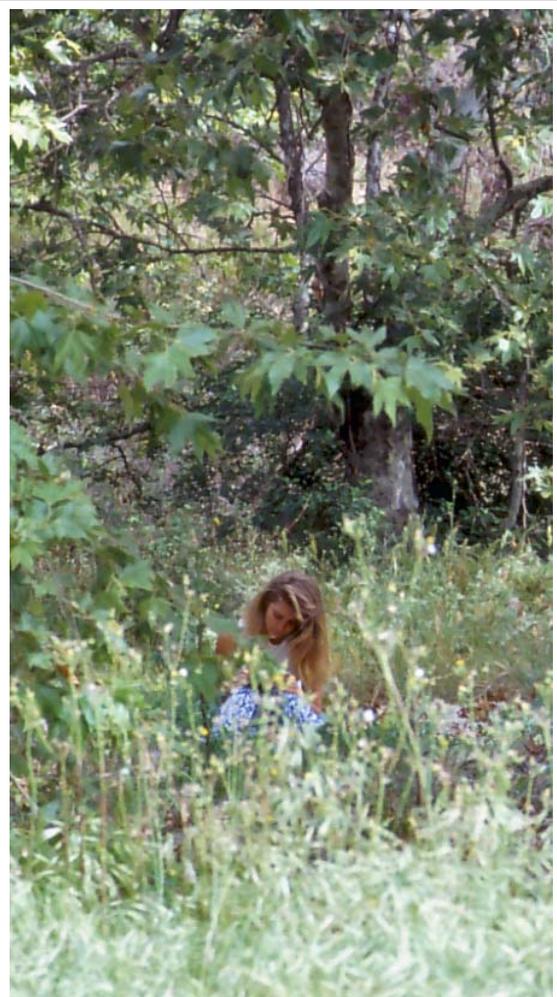
Girl Guide activities were bush-oriented - hiking, tracking and cooking were done in the outlying bush areas. A memorable project for a badge was learning about some of the many trees in the area, by pasting pressed leaves, flowers, bark and pods (where possible) into a notebook. A tart drink was made from the fluffy seeds found in the pods of baobab trees. The climate was warm for most of the year with little rain, and it was often very hot in the summer. Many picnics were held near or on the banks of the great, gray-green greasy Limpopo. Game spotting was a way of life, as was drinking from a dusty water bag attached to the front of the car. Occasionally a late night was spent around a campfire under a pitch-black domed sky, teeming with stars all the way to the horizon.

These first-hand experiences with wildlife led to a life-long habit of enjoying nature, no matter which part of the world, and account for my current exploration of the fascinating chaparral areas where I now live.

- Lynn Watson

A mother, visiting the vegetable and flower garden at Magnolia Elementary School in El Cajon, bemoaned the fact that her Charlie would not eat vegetables. I called Charlie over and asked if he would like to pick, wash, and show his mother a scallion that he had planted. After I snipped the root away, Charlie gleefully chewed on the scallion while his mother stared in amazement. Lesson learned: if they plant it, they will eat it.

- Mort Brigadier



Poetry of a Kindred Spirit

Nancy Jordan

Matilija Poppies

Their faces,
Like massive crumpled handkerchiefs
Woven from snowy white cotton,
Have unbroken egg yolk middles
And stand on slender stems,
Three feet, four feet, five feet tall.
They sway in the breeze,
Exude soft, exotic scent,
And attract to their
Pollen-permeated pistons
Bees in trios!

How can anything
So apparently,
Casually created,
Stun the senses
With such a wonder!



In Early Morning

In the early morning
She turns her chair
In the direction
Of the mountains and
Starts her favorite
Forgiveness prayer.
As she does
It is as if
Drapes are pulled apart,
Windows flung open,
Shutters thrown wide,
And cool, sweet,
Uncontaminated air
Blows gently through,
To cleanse and refresh
The stale and static space
Filled with last night's smoke –
Of yesterday's
Thoughts and ideas.

VELVET ANT: She's from Mars

By Bill Howell

*She's a Singer with a Stinger;
He's a Flier ... Desire to Sire.*

She's a fat lady who can really sing. She's hairy too. Always in a hurry, female velvet ants (not really ants) are robust little wingless wasps that scurry along chaparral trails as ant lookalikes. They're common in southwestern deserts too.

Unlike the famous picnic invaders, velvet ants are solitary and lonely. So lonely, that early scientists misidentified the couples because they were seldom together and looked very different from one another. Each species has mix 'n match color combinations so you have to be an expert to tell them apart — or be a velvet ant. They can tell. Velvet ants, half an inch long, more or less, are black underneath with showy shades of shaggy external fuzz ranging from off white to crimson and phases in between. The armor-like exoskeleton is exceedingly strong. Run over a velvet ant with a car; she just proceeds unscathed.

Being flightless, fat and furry may account for her bad attitude and proclivity for using her nasty barbless stinger over and over. Half her abdominal length is a skewer that may explain another common name — “cow killer.” They can't really execute bovines, but observers have suspected that the cows may have wished they were dead after being stung, usually on the nose, by an irritated velvet ant. The sting is very painful.

Males are smaller, lack stingers, look like wasps and have nice dispositions. The handsome, mellow males have wings that shine and, as top gun fliers, show off for the ladies.



She's a trail walker. These shaggy ladies of the chaparral seek larvae of ground nesting insects to lay eggs in. She's a parasite and a bad mother too, because she leaves her eggs unattended. If teased she'll hum an annoying, squeaky soprano — unusual for an insect. He's no crooner, but still has excessive confidence. He may fly right out of the pupa to mate with the fuzzy old lady, but she is seldom impressed and if he fails an obscure rule of wasp courtship etiquette, she may try to sting him. It's curious that velvet ant mating rituals allow the population to survive. She's got “fight”; he's got “flight,” and life goes on.

Human relationships are alleged to be, “She's from Venus; He's from Mars.” Velvet ant relationships appear to be the opposite. On your next stroll through the chaparral, watch the ground. A fluff of red with six tiny legs may dart across the trail looking for trouble — remember she's from Mars.

UNFOLDINGS

Editor's Note: *The following quote is from an email that we received a couple years ago concerning our previous logo. It took us awhile, but we finally got the message. Our new logo is below. Please let us know what you think.*

A logo is a yantra, a symbol drawn which attracts certain energies: in India many people draw every morning freshly a yantra in front of the door to attract helping or protecting forces. There are yantras for any purpose and each has its characteristic, automatic working influence like a picture-mantra, which works just by being there; companies in the East and West spend much money to find the most fitting logo (yantra) as they know it has a great influence.

I understand that you want to put the fire impact (aspect, etc) in the logo, but the logo shows from left to right, chaparral which has been burnt, chaparral which is burning, and chaparral which is going to be burnt; that is, fire is the only aspect present there. The logo does not show any of the other aspects you have mentioned the California Chaparral Institute stands for, like Chaparral = Pure California, like securing permanently the value of the chaparral.

I would suggest that you find a new logo which mostly embodies the message:
Chaparral - Pure California.

- Christoph Morschel

To stand at the edge of the sea, to sense the ebb and flow of the tides, to feel the breath of a mist moving over a great salt marsh, to watch the flight of shore birds that have swept up and down the surf lines of the continents for untold thousands of years, to see the running of the old eels and the young shad to the sea, is to have knowledge of things that are as nearly eternal as any earthly life can be.

- Rachel Carson

We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give.

- Winston Churchill

No one imagines that a symphony is supposed to improve in quality as it goes along, or that the whole object of playing it is to reach the finale. The point of music is discovered in every moment of playing and listening to it. It is the same, I feel, with the greater part of our lives, and if we are unduly absorbed in improving them we may forget altogether to live them.

- Alan Watts

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

- Maya Angelou

Look upon flowers as the enlightenment of plants.

-Eckhart Tolle

Our New Logo

