From the President
Marla White, Volunteer President

“It is strange how new and unexpected conditions bring out unguessed ability to meet them.”

–Edgar Rice Burroughs

Weeks have passed by since the “Stay at Home” order was initiated. There are times when I’m not sure what day it is and have to consult my smartphone home screen for the information. The rainy days, for which I am grateful, have made the isolation from family, neighbors & friends a bit more difficult. I hope your native plant garden is blooming like mine and you are sharing the bounty with neighbors on their doorsteps.

Thankfully, technology is allowing us to stay connected in a myriad of ways. We FaceTime with family, attend meetings and religious services with Zoom, play virtual Real Mahjong & bridge with friends & strangers, order food with Instacart & DoorDash, purchase plants at Grow Native Nursery, and leave chalk (old school) drawings of hope on the sidewalk.

Kathleen’s emails have provided us with links to stay connected. Please click on each of these to get a taste of CalBG: Forever California podcast, Virtual Garden tours, Virtual classes, Purchase plants at Grow Native Nursery online, https://www.calbg.org/visit/whats-in-bloom. I am grateful for Volunteer Deb Woo’s detailed photos of botanicals and wildlife visitors that brighten my day.

April showers, bring May flowers and hopefully, the reopening of our California Botanic Garden by month’s end. If you are enjoying these virtual benefits, please consider a donation to CalBG to get us through until better times. Until then, I’ll be vicariously walking with David Bryant as he continues his highlight tours.

Be safe. Be well!

—Marla
Dear Volunteers:

It is hard to know where to start! Although your editors permitted me to write an addendum as the last issue of Oak Notes was going to “press,” a great deal has changed since then—or become clearer.

Let me start with the good news: RAIN! Not only was March terrific for rain but the first half of April has been as well. Temperatures have generally continued to be on the cool side (although a warm up is predicted for the last 10 days of April) and this certainly means that our plants have been able to stay well hydrated—or able to re-hydrate if the dry January—February period dried them down. This will put our Garden in much better shape to weather the dry season that is surely coming than if we’d not gotten the March and April rains. The Garden looks just beautiful and we are so sad not to be sharing California Botanic Garden with you, and with the larger public.

Let me continue to more good news. Despite the financial news that I will begin to convey to you below, we have in hand dedicated funding for a number of capital projects and these will go on. Especially terrific news is that we received a major contribution from the Dan Murphy Foundation for the Forest Pavilion. This basically seals the deal in terms of funding. I hope that we will have a contract very soon with our contractor and will be underway! Also very good news is that the backup generator project for the Seed Bank is complete. The propane tanks are filled, and the transition to natural gas (when the power goes out) and then to propane (when the natural gas stops flowing) takes place perfectly smoothly. The installation was just improved by the LA County Fire Department which is also terrific! A couple of other projects are underway and I will write more about them next month.

Next, we have formed a strategic task force on reopening. We must be prepared for what will likely be a staged process, beginning with partial reopening with some safety measures still in place. A number of projects on the grounds are underway to be ready for the reopening. This includes our three welcome stations, all of the new interpretive signage that is being installed, and a number of modest scale beautification endeavors. We look forward to welcoming you back and to your assessment of all that is new.

Now to the double whammy of the COVID19 pandemic and the financial problems that it has caused. California Botanic Garden is, as you know, still closed. I had no choice but to lay-off a few staff members; many more are furloughed and quite a few are working reduced hours. I have also had to implement salary cuts for a number of our staff, including myself. It is my hope that, in time, we can reverse those cuts, but until I can develop a clearer picture of the dimensions of the financial impact on our Garden, fiscal conservatism is essential.

Of those who are still working, about half are working at least partly from home. On any one day, just a skeleton staff of us is actually at the Garden. The exception there is our horticultural team: plant care is essential and so they continue at work as usual.

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A Very Happy May Birthday to:

- Chuck Burt
- Linda Clement
- Dennis Frankeberger
- Margaret Gallagher
- Vicky Geary
- Bruce Ingham
- Hannah Kaiser
- Jackie Pace
- Stephen Simon
- Robert Swank
- Dawn Thielo
Native plants (and other horticultural ‘crops’) are part of the food and agriculture sector, and thus deemed essential. As a result, we have both nursery and horticulture staff working more or less as usual (some with reduced hours/reduced salary).

All of this has been very painful but, as I indicated in my last column, having an excellent group of senior colleagues here has helped. In many such situations, there is strife and tension among those who remain and that is not at all the case here. We are a smoothly functioning team of people who see eye to eye and have the best interest of the Garden as a whole front and center.

Early on, we realized that we needed to do something to draw down the stock in the Grow Native Nursery and also in the production nursery (which has been and still is growing plants to be sold out of the GNN over the course of the season). That stock is valuable and much of it would be hard to coax safely through the summer. We thus went into high gear to figure out how to sell plants online so as to avoid close contact between staff and customers (I have learned that money really is as dirty as I remember being told as a child!). Then we had to plan a system for plant pick-up. What we have done is—if I do say so myself—both very clever and highly functional. It is also very safe in that there is no staff: customer contact or even close interaction.

AND as you know, we are using that same system to make the puzzles from the gift shop stock available to you volunteers—just to you! We want you to stay safe and contentedly at home and so do not want you to get too bored (well, just bored enough that you are raring to get back here when this is over). If any of you have had your eyes on other gift shop merchandise, contact me and I will be happy to facilitate.

Owing significantly to the fact that the Los Angeles Arboretum and South Coast Botanic Garden have remained open, Garden leaders have periodically discussed whether and how we could reopen under current conditions. A month into this nightmare, and partly based on the success of the GNN (and puzzle!) sales, we have decided to try admitting guests under very controlled conditions. For now, we have invited our Acorn members to visit on Wednesday through Saturday afternoons. For now, only a small number of Acorn households will be admitted each hour on the hour (1, 2, 3, 4 p.m.) on those afternoons.

We will be monitoring the Garden carefully to make sure that guests are following guidelines and that everyone (including staff on the grounds) feels safe. We are prepared to make changes immediately, including going back to being entirely closed if it becomes clear that we have not taken the right path. As an example of a change that we might make, we discussed whether to make the Garden essentially ‘one-way,’ with guests perhaps coming in the normal way and then exiting by the old stone gate. We discussed—but decided not to implement—this one-way plan, preferring to trust our guests for now. Trust, but verify! Garden staff will be monitoring guest behavior as just noted and changes will be made as needs be.

By the time that I write for you next month, I will have a clearer view of the financial situation. For now, I will say that four of the Garden’s five revenue streams have been sharply impacted. These are:

• earned revenue (admissions, facilities rentals, gift shop and GNN sales—all impacted, only the last ongoing at all),

• conservation contracts (concern for staff safety and limitations imposed by public land managers have reduced our activity—and thus income—to about 1/3 of normal),

• philanthropy (yes, we must postpone and/or very seriously remodel Forever California at our Garden with a View)—if you are able to help now, we will be very grateful!

• endowment: the value of the Garden’s investment portfolio has taken a major hit; you will understand that that will impact what Garden leaders are comfortable with drawing from the endowment to support Garden functions

At this point, you may be wondering what the revenue stream that remains intact is. The answer is grants from the US National Science Foundation. We anticipate only a minor impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this stream of our revenue. That’s the good news—the bad news is that it accounts for only 8% of our annual total revenue.
I will be able to report to you more fully on financial impact and the steps we are taking by this time next month—at least I surely hope so!

Volunteers! We want you back! Please know that we will invite you to come back as soon as we are able—perhaps by ‘unit’ as it becomes clear what conditions will be necessary to make your return safe. Safety must be our constant watch word! My very best to each and every one of you!

In this superbly special issue of Oak Notes, as we share stories of connection in these challenging times, I want to share how the Garden first connected with me, transforming my life and inspiring my commitment to native plant conservation and celebration.

I first met the Garden on a business trip of sorts. In a previous chapter, I was the studio manager for a major environmental artist, Alan Sonfist, in New York City. We came out to California to discuss various commissions and projects. On the journey, we met with the wonderful Eric Garton (now my predecessor!) to contemplate possibilities for an environmental sculpture at the then Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden.

As we walked through the Garden, I found myself enthralled by the vibrant beauty of the plants and landscapes around me. To be surrounded by the native plants unique to California, a vivid display of the state’s remarkable diversity, was enrapturing. I was deeply inspired by the history of RSABG and its driving philosophy: that California native plants deserve to be cherished and conserved, grown in our gardens, and protected in our wildlands. I think encountering the Joshua tree woodland in the Plant Communities was the final straw—I was hooked.

While it took a few more years to get to Southern California (what was I thinking!), the memory of RSABG was preserved and kindled. When I saw that the Garden was hiring a graphic designer and communications specialist, I jumped.

Fast forward four years (wow!); I am beyond thankful to be a part of this beautiful and remarkable community, one that continually lifts my spirits and provides a sense of empowering purpose. I think about the impacts our volunteers, staff, and stakeholders are making on behalf of California native plants every day, smiling that I can be part of this wonderful family. I miss you all.

During this unreal time, I think about how my first memory of California Botanic Garden (RSABG) has lived with me for years and the meaning it held in my personal and professional journey. I hope your memories of this beautiful Garden are bringing you a similar joy and sense of meaning as we push through this chapter together.

Warmly,
David

Social distancing and staying home from volunteer duties at CalBG is challenging—even a bit discouraging! The phrase “the happiest people don’t have the best of everything, they just make the best of everything they have” has never been more true!

The current state of being has really drawn my attention to my own garden at home and allowed for quiet gardening time. I won’t be ready for a garden tour or anything, but I’ve enjoyed becoming reacquainted with my favorite plants and planning for new areas after months and months of neglect. All of the things I truly love about CalBG (I miss it a lot!) are true at home, too. I love the way being in my garden helps me clear my mind of ruminating...
thoughts and provides an overall place of comfort that I enjoy tending to.

I am heartened to know that even though time away from the Garden is a disruption from our routine, CalBG is making the very best of it with fun and interesting ways to see the Garden with virtual tours, talks about native plants, and educational opportunities—all online! The new ways we are staying connected to the place we love (and one another) are proving to be supportive allies while we are not able to be there in person. Spring brings so much to be thankful for: blossoms and buds bursting from trees, longer days and birdsongs. In celebration of the return of the light and sun, say hello to the month of May! I look forward to the day that the Garden gate is open wide for us all.

**Amanda Behnke**
Director Of Advancement

Volunteers, we miss you! The halls are too quiet. Much has gone on pause waiting for you to return.

I’m handling the essential roles of the advancement office, ensuring the development and membership functions of the garden get the attention they deserve. Karina is currently working from home, focusing on rebranding for when we open as California Botanic Garden. Ming is helping as needed. The events have obviously come to halt.

These are uncertain times. Forever California, the gala, was scheduled for Sunday, May 3. We have looked at postponing, making it virtual, and revamping it. We are still exploring the options and welcome ideas you have.

Fundraising is so imperative at this time. Many streams of our income have halted or slowed drastically. If you are in the position to donate, please do. If you know of someone who might like to join, please encourage them to do so.

I look forward to seeing all of you soon.

**THANK YOU!**

With the Garden closed to all but essential staff members, who are in limited numbers, a special thanks goes to volunteers Chuck and Laura Burt, Enid Eckert, and Debbie England, who stitched handmade masks for the staff on-site. This small but mighty group of volunteers already had answered the call to stitch masks for people working in an essential capacity in the community. When the Garden needed masks these terrific volunteers came through to meet the needs of Garden staff.

Mask-making conserves the supply of health-care grade masks, providing the capacity to block bacterial and viral aerosols and conserving them so that our vital nurses, physicians, and other workers on the front lines retain access to the limited supply.

We are stronger together!

Left: Lucinda McDade
Below L: Amanda Behnke
R: Patty Graves

Neal Uno and David Bryant
It was the 10th Anniversary of Earth Day in 1980. The garden hosted many, many events for the celebration. One evening was just for teachers. We learned songs like “Dirt Made My Lunch,” which I taught our whole school to sing at our Earth Day Assembly. And, there was a contest! My class won with a project on School Lunch Waste.

Fifty years ago, in 1970, I had been a Sophomore in high school for the original Earth Day. We were very involved in world events back then. The DDT crisis was known, our San Gabriel Mountains could hardly be seen. It was a needed event to focus on pollution, waste, the environment.

So, in honor of that event, I always have my school celebrate Earth Week. We have a trash truck, recycling, hikes, worksheets, speakers, songs, and tree-planting activities throughout the week. The students wear colors of the earth every day:

- Mon: yellow-orange Sun
- Tue: green Plants
- Wed: blue Sky
- Thu: Recycled someone else’s shirt
- Fri: Denim, the earth-friendly cotton

This year was set with a Mt. Baldy ranger, but now students will be encouraged to watch Nature shows, try experiments, get out to hike, and celebrate with family.

Happy 50th Earth Day!

Stalwart Virginia Herd has been volunteering at CalBG since 2003, when she began mounting plants in the Herbarium every Tuesday. Her other garden activities include: working in the Butterfly Pavilion, the wildflower show, Bump in the Night, Acorn Festival, Luminaria Nights, Discovery Cart, and others. Virginia currently is a member of the Volunteer Personnel Committee and has just joined the Volunteer Education Committee.

While teaching, she brought classes on field trips and observed California wildflowers as part of a curriculum unit. Beginning her teaching career in El Monte, with a hiatus to raise her children, Virginia ended her teaching career teaching 4th and 5th grades at Barranca School in Covina. Those skills have made her a model Garden Guide with the Friday School Program Team.

Virginia shares her thoughts on CalBG: “I keep coming because it makes me feel like I am ‘making a difference’. I love being outdoors and in nature. I grew up in Los Angeles, but we always had open hills to play in. We collected pollywogs from a neighbor’s fish pond and watched them turn into frogs.

“At the garden I enjoy interacting with other volunteers and the staff makes us feel valued. Each time I come here I learn something new. A few years ago, I was into taking closeup photos of wild flowers. I’d get them developed, choose the best ones and make greeting cards. I always wanted to know the name of each flower (mostly common names at that point). Now I know how important botanical research is.”
Weedy Plants
Fred Brooks, Garden Guide
Photo by P. Brooks

But a weed is simply a plant that wants to grow where people want something else. In blaming nature, people mistake the culprit.

“Weeds are people’s idea, not nature’s.” –Anonymous

April showers bring May flowers—and weeds! Is a weed simply a “plant out of place,” and if so, who decides this and how? Those who work in a garden often must make this decision.

To help reduce your uncertainty, weedy plants characteristically:
• are heavy seed producers
• have seeds that persist in a soil bank
• spread by means other than seed, such as rhizomes
• establish quickly and generally outcompete other plants
• can grow under harsh conditions

One example of a plant out of place is the California poppy (Eschscholzia californica). This poppy is currently an invasive species in New Zealand and Australia where it:
• is a prolific seed producer
• spreads by an explosive distribution of small seeds
• persists in soil seed banks (= super blooms)
• establishes relatively fast from seed or by regrowth from a taproot
• can grow under harsh conditions (heat, drought, poor soil, etc.)

Weedy plants do have positive aspects. Many are ruderal (Latin=rubble) species able to colonize waste ground, like cleared land, logged forests, or recently burned hillsides. But instead of discussing the value of these plants, I refer you to the opening quotation.

Book of the Month
Barbara Nakaoka
Volunteer Library Committee
Book cover: Amazon.com


Katherine Olivia Sessions (1857–1940) grew up with a love of trees and plants. She studied science and graduated from the University of California with a degree in science. She started her career as a teacher, which took her to San Diego, which blazed the trail for Sessions to become the Mother of Balboa Park.

Landing in San Diego, she saw no trees and so the dream started to bring trees to the desert town of San Diego. She was told, however, that she could not grow trees in a harsh desert climate. That did not deter Katherine and she wrote letters to gardeners all over the world in search of seeds. She asked to start a nursery in the City Park to grow these trees and was granted that request. Thus, she began planting trees all over San Diego.

The City Park was the site of the great fair of the Panama–California Exposition in 1915. Kate had another dream and that was to have thousands of trees on display. She made it happen with the help of many, many volunteers.

This is an excellent children’s book that tells of a lady with determination, tenacity, and perseverance. You can feel all of those characteristics and her lifetime commitment to the love of trees in the writing of H. Joseph Hopkins and the drawings of Jill McElmurry.


**Keeping CalBG in our Hearts and Lives**

*Oak Notes is collecting submissions of short stores about how volunteers are keeping CalBG in their hearts and lives. We hope to share more stories in the June issue.*

**Hearts and Lives**

*Linda Worlow*

During the spring of 2018, Claremont experienced a heavy downpour in the midst of triple-digit temps. My neighbor has a *Quercus agrifolia* that is every bit as old and big as The Majestic Oak. Four days following this freak rainfall, a very large limb from that oak that had shaded my back garden since I moved into my wee house, just fell! I woke up to an expanse of greenery. Many truckloads of wood were hauled away in the following weeks and I was left with lots of sunshine and a big bare patch in my backyard.

**What to do?**

In the fall, on a budget and wanting to take time to consider what came next, I took a trip to the Grow Native Nursery and bought packets of seeds: *Eschscholzia californica* (California Poppy), *Nemophila menziesii* (Baby Blue Eyes), *Phacelia campanularia* (Desert Bells), and *Baileya multiradiata* (Desert Marigold). As directed, I mixed all the seeds together with some sandy soil and swung my arm out in an arc to sow the seeds. Sort of like, Scripps College’s seal *La Semeuse*!

To my delight, the following spring the California Poppies were abundant, with just a “hint” of Baby Blue Eyes. The Desert Bells were very few and far between and the Desert Marigolds declined to make an appearance.

*Linda’s California meadow this spring. Yes, there is *Euphorbia peplus* and *Stellaria media* among the “intruders” — I’m challenged to pull the weeds without also pulling out the wildflowers—so it goes. A word of caution, our California Poppies are almost perennial. I sadly realized this after they finished blooming and I started to pull out what I thought were dead plants — my goodness. They have carrot-orange roots (why should I have been surprised?) that are succulent and long. I stopped pulling and just cut back the dead foliage. This spring, with winter rains and sunshine, my wildflower meadow is ‘robust-ing.’ Lots of Poppies, lots of Baby Blues, and even a fair showing of Desert Bells. Despite significant increase in sunlight—those Desert Marigolds ain’t having it. No shows.*

Oh, well. Can’t wait to see what happens next summer!

**Herbarium**

*Lisa Broderick and Mare Nazaire*

While we are in the midst of a pandemic that keeps us from our regular routines and volunteer activities, Mare Nazaire suggested that we Herbarium volunteers might be interested in learning to transcribe specimens for Notes from Nature. Supported by the National Science Foundation, Notes from Nature is collaboration between professional research biologists, botanists, museum curators, amateur naturalists, educators, and citizen scientists to build the most complete picture of biodiversity, species distribution, and ecosystem composition over time. By transcribing label data from the specimen, scientists can use this information to help address key environmental issues that we face today.

I wanted to continue to help with the herbarium work, and decided to try it! This entailed signing up with Notes from Nature ([NotesfromNature.org](http://NotesfromNature.org)). Learning how to enter data from the identification card on the specimen into the database is described in a short You Tube video. If after entering in data you have a question, or are uncertain about the collector’s notes, there are helpful examples to assist you. There is also a chat site where questions can be resolved.

I chose to work with the California collections, including those from Cal State LA. The specimens vary from lupines and yuccas in central California,
to native plants from Peru and Hawaii. Some labels are very detailed, others very generic. I especially admire a collector named Dr. James Henrickson. His early work in central and southern California (1960s and 70s) was mostly for Cal State LA. At the age of 80, he is still an active research fellow at the Plant Resource Center, University of Texas, Austin. He is also a Research Associate at California Botanic Garden and visited the Herbarium in February of this year. I enjoy entering his specimens because of the detailed labeling and consistency of his descriptions; it helps me enter the data accurately and completely. In turn, these data can be more readily used to compare the plants, then and now.

Data entry is more than just a task. I learn about various plants, their specific locations, scientific names, and how the botanists describe the area. I feel I am still contributing to the work of the Herbarium without physically being there. Mare is also planning to credit us with volunteer hours.

It gives me a sense of peace and calm to imagine the collectors and their pursuits, like the descriptions, “Found in open, grassy pastures around oak chaparral…” With so much turmoil in the world, it is nice to immerse myself in a different place and time. Most of these specimens were collected when I was a little girl growing up in rural Pennsylvania. I often cut flowers from nearby open spaces and my mom let me put the white ones in jars. We would put a drop of blue, red, or green dye in the jar, and the dye would be drawn up the stem, coloring the flowers. I also enjoyed helping my mom grow tomatoes, pick strawberries from a farmer’s field, and husk corn in summer. It reminds me that I grew up in a place where there was an appreciation of nature. This is a positive, useful way to spend time and increase your knowledge. So, give it a try.

**Landscaping with California Natives**

Amy Baumann

During this period of “stay at home to be safe,” we have felt very blessed to have a half-acre of property to stroll around and enjoy the outdoors. However, there have been many times over the past decades that the half acre has felt more like a curse than a blessing. We have tried many landscaping ventures over the years. Most of those attempts included trying to keep grass growing in our backyard. A frustrating and never-ending venture at best. Gene and I became volunteers at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden (California Botanic Garden) ten years ago following our retirement. The free-flowing landscaping with beautiful California natives gave us a whole new vision for our backyard.

We are fortunate to have three mature coast live oaks on our property. Areas that were covered by patchy yellow grass are now blanketed in oak leaf litter.

Thanks to the support of the Grow Native Nursery we have islands of planted areas that include barberry, ceanothus, dudleya, snapdragon, and verbena. Perhaps the most exciting part of the transformation is the number of birds and butterflies that have been attracted to the native plants. Gene and I also love that our backyard is now designated as a Certified Wildlife Habitat by the National Wildlife Federation. Volunteer Toni Clark encouraged us to apply for that designation and guided us through the process. Thank you to Toni for that lovely memory. We are grateful to have this natural haven during the challenging time that we are all facing. We are very appreciative of the inspiration provided by California Botanic Garden and look forward to walking the garden again soon.
Spring in the Garden

Clockwise from top left: ceanothus, lupine, California poppy, Channel Island poppy (Dendromecon), iris, redbud, Douglas iris, cactus. Photos by Deb Woo.