

# BEACHCOMBER

SINCE 1946





## Meanwhile, back at the ranch...

Usually around this time, Ocean Riders is hosting our Blues In the Barn event. It is always such a wonderful time to come together with the community to celebrate the horses and the iconic barn (aka hay lounge) while listening to incredible local musicians, enjoying BBQ and connecting with one another. We trust it will be that much sweeter when we can all come together again.



*Marin Ranch School*

In the meantime, like everyone else, we are practicing resiliency. We have had to pause on our regular Equine Facilitated Learning pro bono programs for underserved groups and our customized team development programs. However, two of our members have created Ranch School, an afternoon program for ages 10 – 12. Two afternoons per week, groups come to learn horse care, barn chores, social and life skills, all while having fun with their friends in nature and away from digital screens. Ranch School has been a hit and new groups will begin in the spring.

The recent fires definitely caught our attention. We moved into action to ensure that we have a solid emergency plan in place. With gratitude to Green Gulch, we were permitted to divide the pasture so that if we have to shelter-in-place but away from the barn structures, we can move horses into herd-safe spaces in the pasture.



We conducted a dry-run with horse owners and members and practiced loading horses into trailers in the event that we have enough warning to evacuate. We now have a generator to provide power for communication in a power outage. A tremendous amount of volunteer work was provided by members to cut back shrubbery and grasses. We can't fully relax but at least we are ready to respond if needed.

Perhaps not terribly exciting to anyone but us, we were thrilled to receive a partial grant from Bay Area Barns and Trails to replace our leaking roof over tack rooms, the office and our two medical stalls. As stewards of these historical buildings, we are gratified when we can take care of them so they will retain their charm and remain into the future.

As many of you know, we have lost some of our beloved horses and our canine mascot this year. We have also welcomed new horses and have new regular dog friends at the ranch. This is the cycle of life and we have strong solidarity at Ocean Riders and in this community in our love for the horses and all of the animals in our midst. Let's hold on to that solidarity as we head into fall and winter of this challenging year.

We look forward to welcoming everyone back soon.

– *Ocean Riders*

# Open Air Christmas Market

Saturday, December 5, 2020

By Tayeko Kaufman

Carrying on the tradition of a Holiday gathering at the Muir Beach Community Center we are going back to the future when the Quilters put on the Holiday Arts Fair. For 40 years Judith Yamamoto, Kathy Sward and Outi Onorato (and many other members of the community) worked tirelessly to gather the local artists and crafts people, and children to show their products. It was a very simple affair with just tables and baked goods provided by the community. Over the years the Quilter's Fair grew more elaborate and attained a reputation so that artisans from the wider bay area wanted to participate. Steve Schafer took over the bar assignment; and different caterers took over the task of providing the food, and Denise Lamont took over the advertisement and before we knew it, the Quilter's Fair became the official beginning of the Holiday season at the Beach.

Six years ago, the Quilters decided to retire and Laurie Piel volunteered to take over the running of the fair. She continued the tradition in her very special and wonderful way until the Covid crises prevented any indoor fair to occur. Many residents wanted the fair to continue so the Starbuck circle was considered as a possible location. The issues were daunting so the decision to attempt a new fair on Pacific Way began.

This year we will have an Open Air Christmas Market, European style, on Pacific Way on Saturday, December 5th (with a rainy day alternative for Sunday the 6th). Going back to the roots of the original fair, this will be a smaller local event. The talents of our community will be on full display with a variety of choices for all taste. But most importantly, it will be a chance for the community to come together (with all the Covid restrictions to be observed) and to celebrate how lucky we are to live in this little paradise and keep the tradition of the official beginning of the holiday season in play.

Please plan to come down and join with your neighbors in celebrating this incredible community. The fair will run from 10 am to 4:30 pm. Modest foods: hotdogs and or bratwurst; hot cider, coffee and hot chocolate will be sold along with baked goods. Put on your festive hats and join your neighbors.

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## ON THE COVER

*Full Moon Intentions*

Photograph by Stephanie Holdenried

Captured with her humble iPhone camera

Stephanie is a ranch partner at the Marin Ranch School.

*Ranch School is proud to partner with Ocean Riders and provide financial support to the outreach programs for under-resourced communities.*

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**Beachcomber mailbox** on mailbox row, or to [editor@muirbeachcomber.com](mailto:editor@muirbeachcomber.com).

Contribute your essays, poems, stories, photographs, artwork, announcements, reviews – anything that celebrates Muir Beach and our community. To subscribe, email [editor@muirbeachcomber.com](mailto:editor@muirbeachcomber.com).

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## One of Nina's Pearls

*By Bob Jacobs*

I lost my Nina about two and one half years ago. I have not as yet been able to bring myself to clear out and reorganize the house. Nina had a way of accumulating not only the usual household things, but also, those very special examples of creativity in art, music, writing and poetry. She cherished them, but had no system for storing and preserving them. These pearls are to be found almost anywhere. As a result, when my energy permits, I take the time to go through some of the accumulated boxes, files and the many stacks and drawers. Today I found the poem below. Nina passed away at age 89, and I am now 92. This poem hit the nail on the head for me, and I hope it tickles many of my neighbors - readers of the Beachcomber.

One of Nina's Pearls:

“When I was young, my slippers were red  
I could kick up my heels as high as my head  
When I got older, my slippers were blue  
Still I could party the whole night through  
Now I am old, my slippers are black,  
I trudge to the corner and puff my way back.  
Old age is golden, I've heard it said  
But sometimes I wonder as I get ready for bed  
My eyes on the table, my teeth in a cup  
My ears on the dresser until I wake up.  
Ere I go to sleep, I think to myself  
Anything else I should put on the shelf.  
You ask me how my youth was spent,  
Well, my “get up and go” got up and went.  
But I really don't mind, as I think with a grin  
Of all the places my get up has been.  
And now I'm retired from life's competition  
Nothing left but old age “recognition”  
When I awake in the morning and find I'm not dead  
I eat a good breakfast and go back to bed!!”

“Grace Gray” age 98

“Old age is not for sissies,” I read recently.

## My family needed a lockdown

*By April Randle*

One realization I've come to over the past several months is that my family needed a lockdown. The daily commute, sports schedule, after-school activities, work commitments, and social events were taking an unrealized toll on us. Initially, the onset of COVID and the lockdown added to our daily stress.

For my daughter, the early days were mostly met with feelings of loss and disappointment: no 5th grade graduation, no end-of-the-year pool party, no talent show, and no beach party. It was hard as we all tried to cope with the uncertainty in our jobs and school, worry about our families, losses and disappointments.

However, as the lockdown continued, I noticed a shift in our daughter. With each cancelled event and delayed travel plan she seemed to rejoice. She loves camping, seeing family, and going on adventures, but what she really, really loves is being home.

Now eight months into the lockdown, I realize that I share her sense of relief about being home with no plans and no place I have to be. It took months for me to let go of the need to fill the space with home improvement plans, closet re-organizations, and garden projects. Instead, I'm now filling the space with, well, space. Space for doing some of the simple things I love: reading with my daughter, riding my bike, snuggling on the couch for movies and sitcoms, going to the beach, walking with neighbors, and cooking. It's not that we weren't doing these things before, we were. But now we are doing them with time, with space, and with intention. My daughter seems genuinely happier. She's connecting with the neighborhood kids in a way that wasn't possible before. She is sometimes lonely, but mostly at ease, funny, more relaxed. I think the same is true for my husband and me. We were slower to embrace the benefits of lockdown, but ultimately here we are. That is not to say that there are not moments when we are driving each other crazy or deeply missing our family and friends. But, we are gaining something valuable from being more still, less productive, and perhaps, more spacey.

# Rodenticides and our Local Wildlife

By Anne Jeschke

On October 19, Sandor Hatvany posted the following on Next Door:

## ***Fox writhes in agony on Seacape this morning.***

A friend who was coming to my house this morning, saw a fox writhing in agony, vomiting clear liquid whilst rolling down Seacape Drive towards the junction with Highway 1. He called the Humane Society who came to put him down. They confirmed it was poisoning.

I'm guessing this was a rodent poison. I'm shocked that anyone in our community would use such things. Can we use this incident to raise awareness around direct and secondary poisoning of our wildlife?

If you are outsourcing pest control, you are responsible for their methods.

Truly heartbreaking. And disheartening. Someone laid down this poison. Who? How? When?

Here are a few comments that followed Sandor's post:

*From Beth Nelson:* I'm heartbroken to hear this. I've had two adult fox and 5 kits cheering me on through lock down. No one should be using rodenticide. Fox and coyotes are like rodent vacuums. That is the irony. In Bolinas there are signs everywhere "rodenticide free community." I am happy to start an awareness campaign here. I had a dead red hawk on my porch. For the same reason. Devastating to find. Please - Muir Beachers, talk with your neighbors.

*Laura Pandapas:* This breaks my heart. Using poisons to control rodents is just unconscionable. The impacts are known, and devastating. I would love to see some community action on banning them here in Muir Beach. Is there any way we can do this?

*Tayeko Kaufman:* Thank you Sandor for posting. Last year the Garden Club sponsored 5 barn owl boxes for the community and we put out notices and articles in the Beachcomber asking our community to become a rodenticide free zone. The long range impact of rodenticides is alarming. It goes right up the food chain to our magnificent birds of prey and also our mountain lions and bears, as well as our pets. Perhaps we need to post reminders on a quarterly basis on NextDoor and in our Beachcomber. I had a pair of barn owls at our

location, 240 Sunset for about a week but they did not stay. Still hoping they will come back.

Lonna Richmond has done some research on companies that service Marin County and provide responsible pest control. They are:

Marin Rat and Rodent (Al is the technician) San Rafael, 415-250-0214

Nature Science Pest Control (Jared)  
607 Marin Ave, Rohnert Park, 707-586-2514

Sono-Marin Pest Solutions (Tyler) 707-604-8188

D&R Termite, 1735 Putnam, Petaluma, 707-773-3550

"Gov. Gavin Newsom signed the California Ecosystems Protection Act (AB 1788) into law today, (September 29, 2020) placing greater restrictions — with limited exceptions — on the use of second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides to protect the state's native wildlife." *Reprinted in part from a news release put out by the Center for Biological Diversity on September 29, 2020.*

For more information on nontoxic rodent-control methods, visit [SafeRodentControl.org](https://SafeRodentControl.org).

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## Western Pond Turtle Release

The western pond turtle hasn't been observed in the Rodeo Valley Watershed since 1998. This year, the fourth year of a five-year reintroduction plan, biologists reintroduced 20 turtles to Rodeo Valley and 14 to Redwood Creek Watershed [9/4/2020]. The project's primary goal is to establish self-sustaining populations in the park's watersheds where they previously occurred.

The San Francisco Zoo raises the juvenile turtles for two years until they're big enough to avoid predation. Another threat faced by western pond turtles are pet turtles released into the wild, most commonly an introduced species called the red-eared slider. These introduced pets can bring disease and out-compete native turtles for food. Any unwanted pet turtles should be taken to animal rescue instead of being released in the wild.

*Reprinted in part from a story by Alexandra Grant, Gabi Dunn. Alex Grant is an Editorial Content Specialist for the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy's Marketing and Communications Team. <https://www.parksconservancy.org>*

## Poem For Preparedness

- 1 YETI 1,000 solar generator, light enough that I can lift
- 5 solar lights, with various settings to see or read by
- 1 solar radio
- 1 large solar lantern for eating dinner
- 3 oil lanterns with extra wicks and lamp oil
- 1 double burner propane camping stove
- 1 Big Kahuna portable shower
- 1 Yeti cooler with the capacity to keep food cold for 5 days
- 1 freezer full of ice bags for that cooler
- 2 large solar panels to charge my solar generator
- 3 medium carry on bags full of what one would start over with
- 1 small memento of each parent and grandparent
- 1 box of photo albums, from Tennessee's childhood
- 1 bag of jewelry
- 1 folder of passports and birth certificates & Libro de Familia
- 1 thumb drive of insurance documents and important papers
- 1 folder in my phone of photographs showing each room in my house
- 1 egg basket of my Amish great grandmother, full of small precious and sentimental objects
- 1 cashmere blanket
- 1 kit bag with extra contacts, and all the hygiene items needed for an indefinite journey
- 1 wetsuit
- 1 surfboard
- 1 bathing suit
- 1 towel
- 1 set of earplugs
- 1 sunscreen
- 1 favorite book
- 1 guitar
- 1 violin
- 1 banjo
- 1 mandolin

Because we only have a VW Beetle to go, should we be called to take this journey named "fire evacuation."

In March of 2020, when lockdown began, I realized going to stay with others during smoke filled skies or threatening fires, was no longer possible due to the Corona Virus. And so I began each month to buy just one thing for my fire preparedness kit. As I write this, these things sit waiting in a corner, until the rains come. This is a prayer for safety. May we all have one.

— *Beth Nelson*

## Pandemic

*By Michael Miller*

I am being very careful venturing over the hill during this COVID mess, but the need for food and an occasional change of scene finds me moving about more and more. In case we go back to shelter-in-place and I don't one day get stuck without anything to eat, (and to cut down on the number of trips to the store), I keep a small supply of frozen dinners in the freezer. Stauffer's Swedish Meatballs is one of my favorites. Or, maybe it's really because sometimes I'm just too lazy to cook. But even frozen dinners can present a challenge. I have a small kitchen and several years ago upgraded my microwave oven to one that does more than just heat water to make coffee. It has a Convection Oven, Convection Fast Bake, Grill/Combo along with special setting buttons for roast chicken, cake, pizza, potato, fresh vegetables, frozen vegetables, reheat, warm, defrost and more. And of course the obligatory popcorn button. The problem is when it comes to a frozen dinner I'm stuck. The package says, heat on hi or 1200 Watts for 3 minutes, remove cover, stir and cook at 600 Watts or medium heat for another minute. But nowhere on this microwave oven that seemingly does everything, does it have a setting that says anything about hi, medium, low or the amount of watts it puts out. However, in this age of smart phones, smart TV's, smart cars, and smart kids I just take a guess, push a button, close the door and it cranks out a hot dinner. The oven obviously has a mind of its own and is smarter than me. Bon appetit, stay safe, and don't forget to vote.

## *Hello Neighbors,*

Thanks to Deb Allen, Victor and Sally moved to Muir Beach almost 3 years ago, so a little late introduction for those whom we haven't met yet. We feel very blessed and privileged to be part of this lovely community. After spending 13 years overseas living in various big cities, we chose to retire back in our old neighborhood (we were in Mill Valley before). In Muir Beach, it is not hard to re-discover our true passion for nature, music, food and the simplicity of life, especially after years of hectic fast-paced corporate life.

It all began in 2013 when Chantelle, our daughter who is a nutritional chef and consultant, treated us to a beautiful breakfast of freshly made



*Making a delivery to Mill Valley Market*

granola. We knew then she had created a great recipe, and we were inspired to share it with the world. The mother-and-daughter team launched Chantelle's Granola.

We craft our granola weekly in small batches with care and commitment. Chantelle's Granola is

an artisan, handmade product using the best, 100% organic, hand-picked ingredients. It is gluten-free without any added sugar. It is available at San Rafael farmers market on Thursdays and Marin Country Mart farmers market in Larkspur on Saturdays. It is also available at Mill Valley Market in downtown MV and Driver's Market in Sausalito. For our Muir Beach community, we offer contactless weekly (on Wednesday) free delivery service. A few neighbors around us are real fans of our granola already! Please visit our website: [chantellesgranola.com](http://chantellesgranola.com) or contact us at [chantellesgranola@gmail.com](mailto:chantellesgranola@gmail.com) or 949-701-5810. I have free samples for you to try!!! Stay safe & healthy!

– Sally & Victor Li - 45 Sunset Way

## **Muir Beach Caring**

*By Paul Jeschke*

Tucked away on the inside front cover of the Community Directory and listed in small type with "Ongoing" in the Muir Beach Events Letter is an often overlooked seven digit number with a powerful impact.

320-6847 is the telephone number for Muir Beach Caring, a community portal that arranges help for neighbors in need of temporary help in times of crisis.

Muir Beach Caring was established more than a dozen years ago by the Elderberries, a loosely organized group of volunteers who arranged community dinners, held book exchanges and put together occasional outings to educational and entertainment events. Recognizing that many people occasionally need help for short periods of time, the group put together a list of neighbors who were available to pitch in when the need arose. When someone was

ill, neighbors brought in meals. If a prescription needed to be filled and picked up, no problem. If someone lacked transportation, they asked for and received rides to the doctor or dentist. Following surgery, one resident asked for a neighbor to be in her home when she showered or practiced walking, in case she fell with her new hip. Another resident needed cataract surgery, and required a ride to and from the city.

In Muir Beach many of us have neighbors and friends that we can ask for help, or that just naturally offer to help. But there are times when it is a real help to just call the Caring phone number, and have someone else find that helping hand for you. That is what Muir Beach Caring is for, and you are encouraged to 1) call if you need assistance, and 2) join the volunteer list if you are willing and able.

Muir Beach Caring is not able to respond to emergencies. In an emergency you should always call

911 for the fastest and most well equipped help. Our system is set up to inquire among volunteers for someone who is available to fill whatever service is needed. That may take a day or two. If you need a prescription filled, or a gallon of milk from the store, you may get an immediate offer from someone already out and about and easily able to fill your needs quickly. But for doctor appointments and other times when you can plan ahead, it is important to call the Caring number early.

During a pandemic, you may want someone to pick up supplies or a few groceries for you. If you are older or have medical issues, you should feel free to call on Caring volunteers to help out. What may be difficult for you may be easy for someone else.

Underline the Caring phone number and email in the Muir Beach Directory. Or just call 415-320-6847, and leave a message. Help will soon be on its way.



# USPIS – Protect Us All

*By Eli Pearlman*

Last year The US Postal Service delivered 150 billion pieces of mail.

In August of 2017, one of those packages, shipped priority from Baltimore, contained a drug cocktail that killed a University of Arkansas Medical Sciences employee.

The drugs were purchased on the Dark Web using Bitcoin. Investigators traced the shipment back to a nefarious vendor who called himself “DogFood.”

DogFood sent user quantities of heroin across the country. Fingerprints on related drug mailings belonged to a 33-year-old former USPS employee named Cory Skinner. When Skinner’s house was raided, law enforcement recovered money, postal shipping supplies, a loaded Smith & Wesson 9mm gun, and the laptop computer used to run DogFood’s Dark Web operation.

The agency leading the investigation wasn’t the DEA or the FBI. It was the USPIS.

...

I’ve received the emails from Leighton and Mary regarding the recent wave of mail theft in Muir Beach. Sure enough, when I rolled into town on a recent Sunday morning, the row of mailboxes along Highway One, in front of the Ocean Riders’ barn, were hanging open from the previous night’s hit.

I found myself brainstorming ways to thwart our mail thieves.

As appealing as a Scooby Doo-like sting was, vigilantism seemed a bad idea.

My little brother and I discussed the possibility of an exploding envelope, spring-loaded with glue and glitter.

Or perhaps a coordinated, community effort could be effective, in which we all left notes in our mailboxes with an ominous message: “We know who you are and we’re watching you” ... something along those lines.

Imagination turned into online research – largely fruitless, aside from the typical, boring “get a lock” advice. I did, however, learn something interesting: the US Postal Service has its own arm of federal law enforcement.

The USPIS, or for those unfamiliar with the acronym, the United States Postal Inspection Service, describes itself as the primary law enforcement, crime prevention, and security arm of the Postal Service, providing support and protection to its employees, infrastructure, and customers.

They are the ones who tracked Cory “Dogfood” Skinner’s drug trafficking operation. They also made the news recently for arresting Steve Bannon for defrauding funders.

When drugs, explosives or other illegal items are sent through the mail, it’s the USPIS who leads the investigations. Telemarketing and email scams often fall under their jurisdiction. 100 years ago, a man named Charles Ponzi was investigated by Postal Inspectors and later arrested. Ponzi’s scheme promised huge returns for people who purchased international postage exchanges.

Other USPIS duties include protecting USPS employees. If, for example, you were to assault

your mailman (something I’ve had the urge to do recently due to a mail delivery saga at my house in Santa Barbara) it would be Postal Inspectors that came to the crime scene.

And then of course, there’s the most common mail related crime: when someone steals from your mailbox. Could the USPIS be the answer to our problems?

...

In 1774, tensions between the colonists and England had grown to a tipping point.

Benjamin Franklin had run the mail delivery service between colonies for the English Government for nearly 40 years. But by 1774, Franklin was balls deep in the American revolution. The Crown fired him from his postmaster position.

Franklin partnered up with newspaper man William Goddard to publish the revolutionary leaning Pennsylvania Chronicle. The two couldn’t distribute the paper using the Crown’s postal system, so they used private carriers to disseminate their ideas. The Crown Post was still able to intercept enough mail that they drove the Chronicle out of business, but It wasn’t long before its underground delivery method became the foundation for today’s USPS.

Goddard presented a plan to Congress in October of 1774 to create an American Postal system built on the principles of open communication, guaranteed free exchange of ideas, and freedom from governmental interference.

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Much to the chagrin of Goddard, Ben Franklin was picked as the first postmaster of the new American Postal Service. But a year later, Franklin appointed his old partner as the first Postal Surveyor, whose job it was to investigate stolen mail or postal funds.

With his appointment, the USPIS was born, making it (believe it or not) the country's very first federal law enforcement agency.

The job, by all accounts, was not a boring one. Mail theft was so problematic that at the end of the 18th century congress made stealing mail punishable by death. In the decades that followed, Surveyors walked around toting Tommy guns and busting train robberies. They had storied run-ins with infamous criminal Billy the Kid, and interviewed Lee Harvey Oswald about a mail-order rifle he allegedly used to kill JFK.

The Surveyor's job title was changed to Special Agent, and as the agency grew, eventually became Postal Inspector.

...

Of the dozen or so people I asked, only one had heard of the USPIS, from the sitcom Brooklyn Nine-Nine. Given its history, I was surprised how inconspicuous the agency remains. As far as I could tell, it's not for lack of trying.

Many of the videos on the U.S. Postal Inspection Service's official YouTube channel begin like the opening credits of an NCIS show. One, titled USPIS – Protect Us All, starts out: "Our mantra is protect, prevent, enforce. We go everywhere,

every day. We don't give up. We don't relent."

Later, a bearded man in a suit says, "They say, 'oh you're a lot like the FBI'... I like to tell them, 'no the FBI is a lot like us'."

The USPIS even has its own television show, *The Inspectors*, on CBS. It began in 2015 and remains the only show on commercial television funded by the U.S. government. It's paid for by USPS asset forfeiture. In other words, money and assets confiscated during mail-related crime raids go towards paying for a network television crime drama.

*The Inspectors* has zero critic ratings and zero user ratings on Rotten tomatoes. It marked the first time I've ever looked up a show which had no ratings.

So, what's the deal here? Why is a government law enforcement agency that seemingly tries so hard to drum up public attention so unknown?

...

Whether because of economic struggles, or smarter criminals, Muir Beach isn't alone in its mail woes. Over the first 9 months of 2020, the USPIS logged 177,000 complaints, up 600% from 2017.

Stick-ups directly targeting USPS workers are increasingly a concern as well. That's because deliverymen carry around an arrow key which works like a skeleton key for every collection box, relay box and cluster box in a given zip code. For a mail thief, gaining possession of an arrow key is like finding Willy Wonka's golden ticket. To make matters more

complicated, the USPIS currently has no way of tracking how many arrow keys are in circulation.

An annual report released by the USPIS ran through some of last year's numbers:

Postal Inspectors seized 2,252 assets valued at over \$143 million (whether that's enough for a 5th season of *The Inspectors* remains to be seen). About two-thirds of those seizures involved illegal narcotic and related proceeds, like the \$6000 taken from the home of the Dark Web heroin dealer, DoggFood.

They made 5,759 total arrests, across all types of investigations – from child exploitation rings, to money laundering and extortion threats.

Nearly half of those arrests were for theft or possession of stolen mail.

For context, there were 99,506 reports of mail theft last year. That means at least 98% of mail thieves in 2019 got away with it. If you're thinking about committing a crime, stealing mail might be your best bet. (Bank robberies, on the other hand, are solved over 80% of the time).

If those numbers are any indication, it looks like our mail theft solution will have to come from within. Leighton, Cuco and Kevin, the longtime USPS contractor who delivers our mail, have done a great job of providing the community with those solutions: locks, cameras, mailbox modifications.

If those don't work, I think the exploding glitter envelopes could be fun.

# COVID Cooking

Thanks to the ongoing generosity of our neighbor, Green Gulch Zen Center, and their beautiful vegetables, our Green Gulch farm stand has become a new and much appreciated social center for Muir Beachers.

Each week, I look forward to selecting fresh and sometimes mysterious produce, often while listening to my neighbors share recipes for the latest farm stand offerings. Anne Jeschke shared her recipe for Delicata squash and it is now on my all-time favorites list. So, is it “Covid Cooking” or “Cooking During Covid?” This has definitely been a time of culinary adventures. Who ever imagined grocery stores running out of “active dry yeast?”

As a confirmed mochi addict, I decided it was the perfect time to unravel the mystery of these cloud-like wonders. Enter head Mochi chefs Melissa and Janice, student chef Charlene (myself), quality control volunteers Bo and Mus (Musubi), all gathered in Melissa’s Muir Beach patio/mochi kitchen on a very

warm, late Saturday, afternoon in October, with all Covid safety protocols in place. (Yes, I could have watched how to make Mochi on YouTube, but the truth is, the thought had not even occurred to me.) We simply had so much fun, planning and making, and the entire time I was a bit mesmerized watching the mystery of mochi unfold .... dust board with katakuriko flour, very hot shiratamako arrives from the microwave (the microwave??!), dust with katakuriko, roll out, dust some more, cut circles (what size!!?), place anko, pinch ends, turn over, carefully place in paper cups, .... all the while up to my elbows in a dusting of katakuriko flour. Who knew you didn’t need a special dispensation to make bite size mochi? Not I.. And of course, at last, the best part...taste testing. Oishi Mochi!

We had such a great time, and it was the perfect opportunity to socialize over cooking, talk about family recipes, and appreciate friendships and life in Muir Beach. And Mus has a new friend, I hope.

## OISHI MOCHI

– Charlene Modena

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## Delicata Squash

Wash and cut delicata in half longways, remove seeds, and slice into 1/4 inch slices. Put in bowl with olive oil, salt and pepper, and stir till all are moistened. Preheat oven to 425, place slices on sheet pan, and roast for 30 - 40 minutes, turning them after 20 minutes. You can always add some fresh rosemary, or a little cinnamon, or fresh garlic, but they are delicious just plain.

*Submitted by Anne Jeschke*

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## Lemon Curd

This lemon curd recipe is from Epicurious and is my favorite. It’s simple, delicious, and great on toast, ice cream, or in tarts.

1/2 cup fresh lemon juice  
2 teaspoons finely grated fresh lemon zest  
1/2 cup sugar  
3 large eggs  
3/4 stick (6 tablespoons) unsalted butter, cut into bits

*Submitted by April Randle*



*Photos by Larry Lasky*



## Daifuku Mochi

Daifuku mochi is a Japanese sweet of mochi rice filled with sweet red bean paste. The following recipe is by Namiko Chen of *Just One Cookbook* [www.justonecookbook.com/daifuku/#wprm-recipe-container-58407](http://www.justonecookbook.com/daifuku/#wprm-recipe-container-58407)

### Ingredients

3/4 cup shiratamako (glutinous rice flour/sweet rice flour)

(3/4 cup = 100 g)

3/4 cup water (3/4 cup = 180 ml)

1/4 cup sugar (1/4 cup = 50 g)

1/2 cup katakuriko (potato starch)

1 1/2 cup red bean paste (anko for smooth or tsubuan for chunky)

Some of the ingredients are not typical in a Muir Beach kitchen.

For rice flour, substitute easier to find mochiko (sweet rice flour) in place of specialty rice flour shiratamako. 3/4 cup = 115 g

For dusting starch, substitute cornstarch in place of katakuriko potato starch.

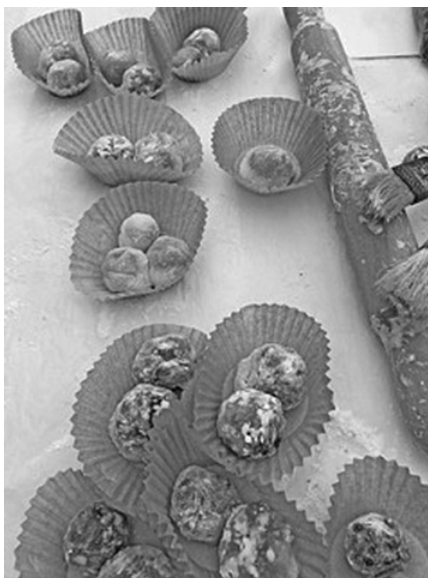
For sweet bean paste, shop Asian section of grocery or make from scratch following a link found in the referenced recipe. Or forgo vegan friendly bean paste; use the mochi wrapper to encase ice cream and freeze your treats. <https://www.justonecookbook.com/mochi-ice-cream/>

### Instructions

Please refer to the Just One Cookbook website for step-by-step instructions. Photos and a video guide you through the easy process that uses a microwave to prepare mochi.

Makes 8 to 12 treats in an hour or so. More fun to make each treat smaller and double the quantity.

*Submitted by Charlene*



## Three Things I Like About Living in Muir Beach

(Idea taken from Ned Riley who contributes to the Bolinas "Hearsay News.")

*By Linda Gibbs*

On a sunny Sunday afternoon during Indian Summer, hence Covid Time, I was sitting in the rose garden reading the NY Times and hearing my neighbor Steve Utstein jamming or practicing with his band. Steve is a professional musician who recently performed with Steve Shaffer at the community center. I moved from foot tapping in my chair to walking out onto White Way and dancing in the street. I whooped and hollered at the end of the tune but I don't think Steve and Company heard me. So thank you, Steve, for this pick-me-upper during such fraught times.

Meeting and enjoying and appreciating neighbors who have become friends.

Many thanks to the *Beachcomber* team—Anne Jeschke (Acquisitions), Janet Tumpich (Design & Production), Maury Ostroff (Circulation & Website), Kate Somers (Editorial Support)—for keeping alive the *Beachcomber* tradition. You are a fine example of community volunteerism.

## Fiction: The Path *By Steven J. Moss*

Though I'd lived in the house for several years, I'd never noticed the gate located at the end of a concrete side path that led from my front door to my neighbor's fence. I'd walked the short trail to within a few feet of the fence, where further passage was blocked by a cluster of Coyote bushes. I'd wondered at its purpose – a paved path to nowhere – but never for long.

It was just another oddity in a property full of them. Hoses randomly snaked from one place to another, attached to nothing; neat piles of firewood decayed far from any place to burn them, as if waiting to be lit as signal fires; stray bits of metal and plastic, some recognizably hardware, most unidentifiably shaped, periodically emerged from the dirt, like cicadas heeding a soundless call.

Now, leaning squinty-eyed into the Coyote bushes, I could make out a door outlined in the fence, thinly covered by a tangle of Wisteria. Brown-rusted hinges camouflaged themselves against the weathered wood. "Huh," I said out loud. "Curious."

A few days later, as I lingered on the path to admire a handful of succulents I'd just planted, a thought bubble drifted into my head and popped softly. The fence gate, the path, they'd been placed intentionally, concrete evidence of a relationship between the two properties, one sufficiently strong to merit undertaking a modest construction project to link them together.

I rolled the insight over my tongue. The woman who sold me the house, and then promptly died, had spoken bitterly about her next-door neighbor.

"Not trustworthy," she said. "Better to stay away."

I hadn't probed further, filing the admonishment in my mental folder marked, "people, places, things to avoid." It's one of my favorite files. Everything in it marks someone or someplace with whom or which I don't have to engage, not even think about. A responsibility relief.

My few interactions with the neighbor reinforced the former owner's advice. I'd encountered her a handful of times. An elderly woman with hair badly dyed blonde, as if she'd tie-dyed it by knotting together various strands and then dipping her head into a metal bucket filled with yellow paint. Her voice came first, announcing her impending appearance, a screech to

"stop that noise" or "I'm calling the sheriff" loosely directed at the distant sound of a chainsaw, or more fiercely at my gardener's hammering in an irrigation system. The last time she materialized, shouting from her deck, she was wearing something akin to a patched together burka – a veil that looked like it was fashioned from a well-used kitchen rag; floppy hat; muumuu-style housecoat – which I took to be pandemic-wear. For all I knew, she worn it all the time, protection against any number of lurking ills.

When I first moved into the house, I tried my best to be friendly with other neighbors, introducing myself as they walked by with their dogs, asking the right questions about the weather, or where to buy groceries. I discovered that mentioning the former occupant of my house, who'd owned the property for more than 40 years, had the opposite effect of "open sesame." It stopped conversation entirely or caused an uncomfortable shift. The neighbors looked towards their feet, or over my shoulder, before quickly saying their goodbyes. The longest verbal reaction I received was, "Yes. Harriet. A complicated person," followed by the sound of someone walking away, yanking at their dog's leash.

Once I discovered the reaction I could elicit just by dropping her name, I used it like a weapon.

"Did you know Harriet?" "I bought Harriet's house!" "You don't know me, but perhaps you knew Harriet!?" I'd lean in after launching the query, happily anticipating the tiny explosion I hoped to glimpse within my target's eyes, which tickled a deliciously deep memory of long-ago spats with my younger brother. I was disappointed when they had no idea who I was talking about.

I'd made few friends. No one who might be able to solve the fence-gate mystery. No one, except perhaps Jo-Jo.

Jo-Jo was the neighborhood's oldest living resident. His body seemed to have morphed into a shape more turtle than human; tough leathery skin, a kind of shell-like hump on his back that forced a permanent 20-degree bend. My previous attempts at conversation, which were mostly directed at the fluffy white hair that covered the top of his head, Chia Pet-style, had failed,

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but not for the usual reasons. He was close to deaf. Only the stealthiest of words, uttered in exactly the right pitch, seemed equipped to sneak past his aged oral defenses.

I found him, twice-bent, weeding his front yard at a sloth-like speed.

“Hi, Jo-Jo!” I yelped, keeping a respectful distance. No response.

“Jo-JO,” I tried again, modulating my voice to mimic an adolescent boy in mid-puberty.

Jo-Jo wobbled mostly upright, eyes sparkly beneath caterpillar brows. He smiled, gave a half-wave, and slow dived back to his previous position.

“UmMMM, could I ASK you a QuesTION?”

He nodded as he slowly ascended.

“Did YOU know HARRiet, the woman I bought MY HOUSE from?”

Something flashed in his eyes. He kept nodding, though the motion could have been his head relocating its balance after he stood up.

I paused, not sure how to best formulate my question. “Um, DID she get A long with her NEIGHBOR? I MEAN, THERE’S a path between HARRIET’s, um, MY, property and a gate in the FENCE NEXTDOOR...”

Jo-Jo looked at me, his head bobbling. He’s eyes shone like a bird of prey, or a brilliant star at the bottom of a very deep well.

“The path was well used,” he said, in a strikingly clear baritone. “Then, in time, it wasn’t.” He smiled amiably, gave an exhausted wave, and slowly bent back to his task, dismissing me.

WTF, I almost said out loud. If I wanted a cheap Yoda substitute I’d go to the Zen Center, or look at Tik Tok. I wanted to shout at him, to demand a better answer.

“THANK YOU,” I screamed. “SEE YOU LATER.”

I slow walked back home, cursing myself for taking an interest in something. Still, I couldn’t let it go. Once an item was out of my no-responsibility folder it was almost impossible to stuff it back in. It lay there, sharp-edged, pricking at my mind. I picked up my pace, and

soon found myself at my neighbor’s front door. I raised my hand to knock, pausing in mid-air like a Black power salute. A couple of crows cawed behind me. I started to turn towards them when the door burst open. My neighbor stood in the threshold, in full faux burka, only her eyes visible above the rag-veil. I could see hurt in them, which snapped to anger. We stood, silent, looking at one another.

I cleared my throat. “Um. Hi. I live next door,” I stammered. “I was wondering. Did you know the former owner, Harriet?”

Something shifted in my neighbor’s eyes. They softened. She opened her mouth slightly, as if to speak, and then frowned. Another moment passed. I smiled, first weakly, then, mustering all my strength, as warmly as I could. She took a deep breath, and gently sighed.

“I thought I knew Harriet,” she finally said, her voice hoarse. “But it turns out I didn’t.”

She stepped back and shut the door.

The story of the path and gate, placed long ago and then abandoned, is still hidden, at least from me. I haven’t seen or heard my neighbor since I encountered her at her door. Though things are quieter, I miss her occasional angry screams.

I regularly pass Jo Jo’s house. When he’s in his yard, he waves me by, like a traffic cop ensuring proper flows.

It bugs me, the not knowing. As I take my daily walks around the neighborhood I chant to myself – path, gate, closed, path, gate, closed – as if by cracking open the words themselves would reveal the mystery. I experiment with different accents, emphasis; PATH, gate, CLOsed, which I’m tempted to take to Jo Jo, but don’t. I like the sounds that can be shaped from “path” and “gate;” “closed” makes me feel angry. I work the word harder, then softer, experimenting with its feel.

If I see a gate on one block or another I’d previously not noticed I often stop and examine it carefully, eying the vegetation to measure its frequency of use. Sometimes someone comes out. We strike up a conversation, about the weather, or their garden. I never ask them about Harriet. But I want to.

# Brass Tacks (as in getting down to Brass Tacks)

By Gerry Pearlman

Nowhere in the world is more money spent, with time and resources wasted, than in the election process of the United States. There is little to no hiatus from the end of one election to the beginning of another. And there is no transparent accounting for the billions now being spent on electioneering and its effect on the overall economy. But there is little question as to who gets most of the money spent on elections, and that would be the media covering it. All that is by way of saying that like the automobile industry, or the military industrial complex, the cost of elections play a significant role in the health of the economy.

And now there is even a newer twist with the high profiling of voter suppression. It has been present since the country's founding; and continues today to create the uneven playing field in the elections taking place now in the so called arsenal of democracy. In any other competition cheating is roundly condemned, but today in elections, it is accepted as political strategy or dirty tricks.

Currently there is the feeling on the democratic side that all would be well if we could only remove the current president from office; while the republican side claims the country would descend more rapidly into ruin if the current president loses the election. These two political parties have a long and chequered past in our country's history. And as political parties both have been much more significant in determining the course of our country's history than any individual occupying it's highest office.

Whether you label the two sides right and left, progressive and conservative, democrat and republican, free market or regulatory, the best system would incorporate the best elements of both ideologies.

But it may be asking too much of our political leaders to abandon their blindfold view of partisan politics. At any historical moment an extreme leader of an ideology may emerge to champion its cause. And there is always the danger that such extreme leaders on the right can evolve into dictators; and on the left to the blood thirsty tribunals of the French Revolution.

The mistake is to regard such extremism embodied in a particular leader as someone whose removal by itself will solve all the problems facing a country. The present White House incumbent merely represents a long line of political leaders who think as he does, more or less. Criticism ad hominem detracts from a true understanding of what is actually at stake in an election.

What we need to vote on is not the leaders of both parties, but which side of the fence we fall on for the following issues just to name a few of the most important ones:

Climate change initiatives; Right to life; Gun control; Comprehensive health care; Balanced budget; Immigration reform; Criminal Justice reform; Campaign Finance; Voter suppression; and Media reform.

Where those leaders aspiring for office stand on these issues is never clear because the election process has to pander to the greatest amount of votes received, so they will fudge their answers so as not to alienate a potential voter. Straightforward clarity on the important issues of the day should determine **what** we vote for, not **who** we vote for. And whatever wins the majority of votes (without voter suppression being an issue) should be the direction the country follows! The identification with one ideology or another is hardly an accurate assessment of belief. Sure there are extremists on either end of the spectrum-the so called "hardliners" but for the most part and for most people their beliefs encompass both ideologies i.e. they may be conservative about some things and progressive about others so that the limited ideology of republican or democrat, progressive or conservative fails to truly represent the full scope of their beliefs.

Prattling on about the virtues of one or the other ideology, while ignoring the failures of both only further removes us from realizing the necessity of amalgamating both viewpoints into a coherent vision of:

**"adequate government regulation as to prevent what is clearly not in the public interest, and sufficient freedom to discover what truly is."**



# Marin Real Estate and COVID-19

*By Debra Allen*

In many ways selling real estate in 2020 is better, but also very different. After the initial spring SIP orders, real estate became part of the essential business group, and we had to learn changing rules and forms weekly. Starting in early summer, Marin became very busy, with what felt like everyone from SF wanting to move here. In late summer (most likely due to the fires), we had a lot of Marin sellers wanting to move out of state. Here's where we are now, in mid-October:

Buyers, sellers and real estate agents must sign CAR health forms prior to entering homes, we must always make advanced appointments now to preview/show homes for sale, in order to avoid contact with other agents/clients. We often need to provide proof of a buyer's ability to purchase prior to entering homes. We need to provide names. Clients and agents use separate cars and wear masks (often booties and gloves, too). Agents must wipe down lock boxes and some surfaces before leaving homes. Open houses, broker tours and take-away products like brochures and business cards are things of the past. We can't even say the words "open house." Posting Covid-19 entry rules and having PPE and sanitizer is a must at entries of homes for sale. If the homes are occupied, owners must leave during all showings. Photographers can't touch or move furnishings around like they used to for shot set ups. Title companies are signing buyers and sellers via mobile notaries, avoiding the need for visits to their offices. Real estate offices are pretty

much staying locked (office mtgs are via Zoom); only allowing for necessary agent visits, after a pre-signed health form is rec'd. I've had buyers this year who haven't been able to get flights to see the homes in person until after the close of escrow, and sellers who are mostly virtual (who I've not seen in person until the end of the escrow, or ever met). Different, indeed!

The fall market is even busier! While it's taking longer to get mandatory resale reports from cities, and inspectors are booked up weeks in advance, we know to start the listing process sooner, so the homes can hit MLS or the off-mkt sites ready to receive offers. Homes in all towns and price ranges are commonly receiving multiple offers now. Loan rates are great, but many homes are selling for cash, as buyers move from different investments in to real estate. Many are buying with non-contingent offers.

Areas of Marin that used to take a longer time to sell (especially the coast), now seem to have buyer waiting lists. In the last 6 months, Stinson Beach now has the highest average sale price per sq ft in the whole county, surpassing Ross! Bolinas is selling now between Tiburon and Belvedere's average sale price per sq ft. And Muir Beach and Pt Reyes are right between Tiburon and Larkspur's average sale price per sq ft. Inverness is pretty much matching Kentfield, Sausalito, Mill Valley and Corte Madera now, in average sale price per sq ft. And the least expensive Marin towns now are Novato, Fairfax, San Rafael, San Anselmo

and Greenbrae. (Of course sq ft, is just one way to consider value, but many of you use that, so I thought you'd be interested to know.) I think a lot of the change in buyers' habits (esp. wanting to move to the coast) has to do with the fact that they need homes to work from and to study in, as commuting to work and schools is not as important as it had always had been before.

So, while the process now takes longer to plan and implement, and we agents must be much more careful about who and how many we are with, it's safer for sellers, their homes, buyers and all of us in the business. It's also been a record, price-breaking year in Muir Beach!

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## LEFT OUT

*By Harvey Pearlman*

I've always admired people who can put words together to make a sentence; put sentences together to make a paragraph; put paragraphs together to explain, critique or make a story.

My brother does it in many of his writings you can find in the Beachcomber. My nephew can do it in his writings on sea level rise and his travel letters. And kudos to Nina for being able to do it in her award-winning book. Eli can do it with his travel experiences and business dealings. As for me, maybe this is not my skill. Maybe putting on events at the community center is my thing instead.

# *The Critter Report: Wildlife Heroes*

By Dave MacKenzie

There are some fantastic organizations which help defend our local wildlife from habitat loss, climate change, and other harms which cause them to have a tougher life. Here is a list of some of the groups who have been protecting our critters from various assaults, and who are worthy of any support you can give them. How about a few bucks of year end donations to one or more of these worthy causes? There are more than I am listing, but these are local and stand out. (Note that all of these organizations also have great Facebook pages.)

## **Project Coyote, Mill Valley:** **projectcoyote.org**

Camilla Fox and her professional team have developed this small non-profit into a real defender of wildlife. With her lobbying, excellent scientific support staff, and constant devotion to educating the public about the real and imagined risks of predators, she has helped stop wildlife killing contests in many states, helped stop inhumane practices like leg trapping or use of explosives for killing coyotes, wolves, and sometimes by accident pet dogs or even children. Much of the training involves giving people a true, not fear-based, picture of these animals and how we can co-exist. Our local actor Peter Coyote is one of the project's popular spokespersons.

## **Felidae, Mill Valley: felidae.org**

Researcher Zara McDonald leads the Bay Area Puma Project, to study mountain lions and communicate with the public about the real risks involving our largest predator. Years of monitoring since 2007 have painted a picture of how these

elusive animals try to co-exist with us as habitat becomes fragmented and developed. Felidae has helped develop rapid response protocols for police and other first responders who are called to deal with a big cat, should it enter a "human" neighborhood and potentially cause conflict. There are some great tools on their website which allow you to track collared lions in various areas. Felidae also offers webinars and other training in this age of Covid. Yes there are a few pumas in Marin, and even a few lucky Muir Beachers who have seen one here!

## **The River Otter Ecology Project,** **Forest Knolls: riverotterecology.org**

Megan Isadore and Terrence Carroll have been studying the return of the North American River Otter to Marin County since otters were first spotted here in the late 1990s. The presence of River Otters is an excellent sign of good quality watersheds, and the occurrence of otters in Redwood Creek, although irregular, is a testimony to a high quality of our environment. I have worked with this group for seven years, and am impressed by their constant attention to education and real scientific studies. The technical quality of their work has earned partnerships with the GGNRA, PRNS, Marin Water District, Mt. Tam State Park, and other groups. The organization has pandemic-friendly webinars available. You too can be an Otter Spotter!

## **Marin Audubon, Mill Valley:** **marinaudubon.org**

Barbara Saltzman and many volunteers have been defenders of birds and bird habitat in Marin for many years. Local political

involvement and campaigns have protected numerous marshes and other habitat in Marin whose presence we can now all enjoy. In addition, this group has had birding and nature walks (free) for many years, with exceptional expert leaders such as Muir Beach's own Jim White. If you want to learn from the best, try one of these walks! Hopefully they will be active again as soon as we can get this virus thing beat down more. Monthly meetings are now on Zoom, of course.

## **Audubon Canyon Ranch, Bolinas:** **egret.org**

ACR's Martin Griffin Preserve is familiar to many of us as the place to go to see nesting herons and egrets. At least it was until a few years ago, when a Bald Eagle decided to dive bomb the place and drove egrets elsewhere. It is still a fantastic spot for birding, hiking, and seeing videos of the complex wildlife. Of course everything is virtual right now.

ACR also owns a number of preserves, some in Sonoma county, where monitoring of wildlife, including mountain lions, is being conducted. Fire succession studies, due to the fierce fires in the area of the last few years, are a key research priority. By the way, this year Marty Griffin is 100!

## **Environmental Action Committee** **of West Marin, Pt. Reyes Station:** **eacmarin.org**

EAC has become a powerful lobby group for West Marin nature in both Sacramento and Washington. It's annual Pt. Reyes Birding and Nature Festival, although not held this year due to the pandemic, has been a well attended fundraiser with many

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talks and walks given by local (and sometimes international) experts on various subjects. Protecting the amazing wildlands of West Marin, especially Pt. Reyes National Seashore, is top priority.

**Point Blue, Petaluma: [pointblue.org](http://pointblue.org)**

Still remembered as PRBO (Pt. Reyes Bird Observatory) to many of us, this organization has a fantastic headquarters in Petaluma, and various wildlife stations such as Palomarin in Bolinas. It's technical staff is the best, and it has trained many generations of interns (some of whom started out banding birds here along Redwood Creek) who have gone on to become top biologists in various organizations. Many activities, webinars, and nature walks are available (when normal times return).

**The Xerces Society, Portland: [xerces.org](http://xerces.org)**

Not really local, this is the group defending our invertebrate world, e.g. butterflies and freshwater insects, to name a couple. For several decades our favorite local ranger Mia Monroe has been active with this group, and has led the local Thanksgiving Monarch Count here in Marin. As most of you know, the Monarch population on the California Coast, including Muir Beach, has crashed and is so desperate that the candidacy of the Monarch as an endangered species is being considered. Xerces has excellent training and plans for habitat improvement, e.g. how to plant a butterfly garden (but not the wrong type of Milkweed in Muir Beach!).

In addition to these groups, there are many others which I could mention, but are not quite as local. E.g., check out the Golden Gate Parks Conservancy, Pt. Reyes National Seashore Conservancy, Marin County Open Space District, NOAA, The Marine Mammal Center, Trout

Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy (which owns Spindrift Point in Muir Beach), and the Center for Biological Diversity, and even more! So when you open your wallet a bit at the end of this year to help out a few worthy causes, remember our local hero critter defenders!

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## Send My Roots Rain

*By David Leivick*

Send my roots rain, Lord  
Send my roots rain  
Send my roots rain Lord  
Send my roots rain  
I don't ask for forgiveness  
Not profit or gain  
Just a moment of grace, Lord  
Send my roots rain

I'm still scratching the surface  
Still digging the fields  
Still chasing the shadows  
For what might be revealed

They say it's a drought year  
And it's taken it's toll  
I try not to bend  
But it's burning my soul

I'll cash in my big chips  
I'll pay all my fines  
I'll take care of business  
And stop wasting time

But the hills are on fire  
And my heart is aflame  
I'm not one for begging  
But send my roots rain

Send my roots rain, Lord  
Send my roots rain  
Send my roots rain Lord  
Send my roots rain  
I don't ask for forgiveness  
Not profit or gain  
Just a moment of grace, Lord  
Send my roots rain

I'll walk in the valley  
With my head held up high  
Cause nobody's counting  
Who lives and who dies

I try to be gentle  
And I try to be kind  
But the woods are all ashes  
And the smoke makes me blind

The windows are melting  
It's just how it goes  
Our garden is dying  
Except for one rose

And I'll give it to you, Love,  
It's all that remains  
At the end of our journey  
I pray send my roots rain

Send my roots rain, Lord  
Send my roots rain  
Send my roots rain Lord  
Send my roots rain  
I don't ask for forgiveness  
Not profit or gain  
Just a moment of grace, Lord  
Send my roots rain

*These are the lyrics to a song off my "Still Chasing the Shadows" album which seems particularly relevant these days. The album can be downloaded from Spotify, Amazon, Apple Music and many other streaming services. Stay well!*

# Water Element

By Ernst Karel

The most recent period of drought in our area is described by the California Department of Water Resources as lasting from 2012-2016.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the National Integrated Drought Information System (NDIS) – a program of the NOAA authorized by Congress in 2006, and online at [drought.gov](http://drought.gov) – describes it as lasting over seven years, beginning on December 27, 2011 and ending on March 5th, 2019. Given the reality of anthropogenic climate change, resulting in more extreme weather conditions across much of the planet, there is no reason to assume that the drought of 2012-2019 was an anomaly; indeed, we could be entering into a new era of what's being called “megadrought”. In a recent study published in the journal *Science* in April of this year, the authors “use hydrological modeling and new 1200-year tree-ring reconstructions of summer soil moisture to demonstrate that the 2000–2018 drought was the second driest 19-year period since 800 CE, exceeded only by a late-1500s megadrought.”<sup>2</sup> The term megadrought basically means a decades-long period of low precipitation and soil moisture, with less frequent wet years and drier dry years. As geomorphologist Jeffrey Mount and hydroclimatologist Michael Dettinger wrote this summer for the Public Policy Institute of California, “California’s climate signals suggest that the state is experiencing a megadrought along with much of the West, as evidenced by precipitation and, perhaps most important, temperature anomalies. ... What does this mean

for California water management? If the state is in a megadrought, it means a great deal. We should plan accordingly.”<sup>3</sup>

As of this writing in late October, the Muir Beach community has been under mandatory water restrictions since September 9 – an unusually long period this year. This means that we are being asked to reduce our overall water usage, with ‘excessive’ use subject to monetary penalties. This article will attempt to delve into certain aspects of the background and larger historical and ecological contexts of our current water situation, including the reasons for this now nearly annual need for reduced water usage, and hopefully will be useful in imagining a healthy, sustainable future for our community, broadly conceived as consisting of our entire ecosystem.

As many of us know, and some of you experienced, Muir Beach famously began as a community of do-it-yourselfers where you could live as long as you didn’t mind brown water. Since the CSD merged with the Seacape Subdivision in 1970, water quality improved and for 50 years now the community has gotten used to a reliable supply of good water. Where does this good water come from? The MBCSD maintains two wells, one dug in 2002 and the other in 2008, on a parcel of CSD-owned land along Redwood Creek in Santos Meadow. One well is in operation at a time, usually the 2002 well. The wells tap into groundwater that underlies Santos Meadow and some length of Redwood Creek. Interestingly, water from the two wells exhibits different

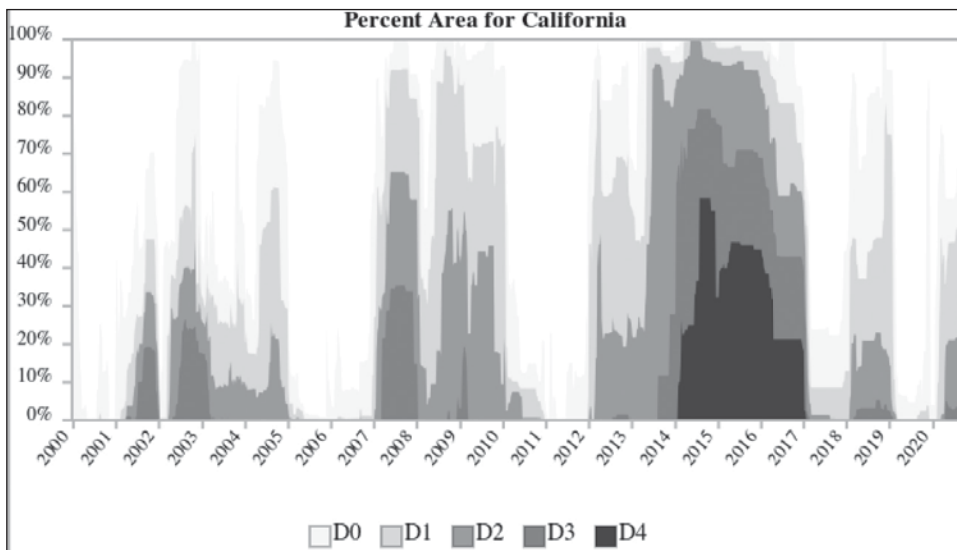
characteristics; for example, the pH value is slightly different, and the water from the 2008 is cloudy or bubbly, while that from the 2002 well is clearer. These observable differences indicate that the two wells are tapping into different water sources or underground streams, rather than into a single continuous or homogenous aquifer.

To date we have never had to reduce our pumping from the well due to lack of capacity. However, we don’t really know what the capacity of the well is, nor do we actually know much about the condition of the aquifer from which we draw. What we do know is that there is an observable relationship between our pumping and the level of Redwood Creek. Redwood Creek is of course subject to seasonal variation and multi-year drought. How might this affect our water supply years or decades from now, and how is this affecting the larger ecosystem we are a part of?

Despite the last drought “ending” in 2019, the NDIS’s US Drought Monitor shows that Marin County and surrounding areas continue to experience category D2, Severe Drought, even now. And indeed, many of our neighboring communities are currently imposing strong restrictions on the amount of water residents may use. For example, the Bolinas Community Public Utility District issued a community-wide heightened water conservation alert this summer, and held a special meeting regarding their water supply on September 30, 2020, to raise awareness of the continued need to reduce water usage by all residents and

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*Drought in California from 2000-2020*, from the National Integrated Drought Information System (drought.gov). Categories are: Abnormally Dry (D0), Moderate Drought (D1), Severe Drought (D2), Extreme Drought (D3), and Exceptional Drought (D4).

businesses.<sup>4</sup> Also on September 30, the Inverness Public Utility District issued a Stage 2 Water Shortage Emergency, noting that 2019-20 was “one of the driest years recorded in Inverness and the driest year since 1976/77.”<sup>5</sup>

Bolinas and Inverness rely on surface water, i.e. streams and springs, for their water. Our nearest neighbor with a separate water supply, Green Gulch Farm Zen Center, also generally relies on a spring as their main source of water, and in the dry season switches to a slow-pumping well (which on its own would be insufficient to provide for their total water needs). Meanwhile, Stinson Beach and Muir Beach are fortunate to have wells which tap into ground water which is less immediately vulnerable to seasonal conditions. Stinson’s wells are recharged by water flowing off the west side of Mt. Tamalpais, while ours are recharged by water flowing into the Redwood Creek watershed. One form that planning for a potential megadrought will have to take is to make sure that we

as a community, over the long term, do not assume that the aquifer we access is invulnerable to drought, and that we not take more water from the aquifer than can be recharged. This requires thinking longer-term than a season at a time, because aquifers rely on water percolating down slowly through the earth to recharge, a process which can take many years — not just one good rainy year.<sup>6</sup>

We can learn more about the aquifer by observing Redwood Creek, with which it is interdependently related. As the heart of our watershed ecosystem, the Redwood Creek is carefully monitored. For example, at the bridge where Highway 1 crosses Redwood Creek, just at the Banducci driveway, the US Geological Survey (USGS) maintains a solar-powered monitor which records water level and the creek’s rate of discharge in cubic feet per second, which data can be viewed online.<sup>7</sup> As of this writing, both are extremely low and getting lower by the day.

The MBCSD and NPS are in close communication to try to mitigate the effects of our pumping on the flow of Redwood Creek. On October 1, Mary Halley, Leighton Hills, and I as a member of the water team had an online meeting with representatives from the NPS, USGS, and the California Dept of Fish and Wildlife for a friendly meeting at which all of us were united behind the goal of doing as little harm as possible to the watershed ecosystem. One thing discussed was possible modifications to our pumping schedule, and as a result of that conversation, we are currently experimenting with pumping for shorter periods multiple times over each 24-hr period, rather than a single longer overnight pumping session each day.

At this point it may be useful to review the history of the interrelationships involved. Prior to obtaining a Water Rights Permit from the California State Water Resources Control Board in 2001, the CSD had to appease concerns from NPS that pumping water from near the creek would divert water from the creek and contribute to extreme low-flow events downstream. This is because when the creek’s flow is very low, the creek separates into disconnected pools with dry stretches between them. In such cases, water may continue to flow underground, but without flowing above ground over gravelly riffles, the dissolved oxygen (DO) content of each pool can fall to a level below what’s necessary to sustain life; if that happens then any fish trapped in that pool will die. In this way, the survival of endangered species such as coho salmon and steelhead trout is threatened.

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## Water Element cont.

I was able to observe this first-hand, given the current condition of the creek, with several disconnected pools. One morning in early October, Darren Fong, aquatic ecologist for the NPS, offered to bring his instrument for measuring dissolved oxygen and meet Mary Halley and me at the creek. We first established a baseline reading at the Highway 1 bridge of 4 mg/L, and then walked upstream. It had been over three weeks since isolated pools had first been observed. The first pool we came to had cloudy water, and the DO was even lower than what Darren had expected, at less than 2 mg/L, which condition is known as hypoxic.

Returning to the history, the conditions of the water rights permit led in 2002 to the MBCSD Resolution for the Conservation of Water during Officially Noticed Water Conservation Periods.<sup>8</sup> The CSD also formed a Technical Advisory Committee composed of representatives from MBCSD, State Water Resources Control Board, National Marine Fisheries Service, California Department of Fish and Game, California Department of Parks and Recreation, and NPS, which worked for more than two years to come up with an Adaptive Management Plan (AMP), adopted by the CSD in 2005. This included a water conservation plan, monitoring program, evaluation of alternative water sources and storage options, pumping schedule, and reporting schedule. Most importantly, as Darren Fong noted, “the document was written and intended to be a ‘living’ document that could be updated in the future.”<sup>9</sup>

The AMP includes a conservation ordinance that is triggered by critical water flow level in the creek conditions, and specifically the appearance of isolated pools, which this year began on September 9. At such a time the community is required to reduce its maximum daily pumping from its usual cap of 45,000 to less than 35,000 gallons per day.<sup>10</sup> And since the current conservation period began, the community has successfully reduced its overall usage, with recent 10-day averages hovering at around 30,000 gallons pumped per day.

So what kind of usage targets should people have in mind in terms of conserving water resources? New long-term water efficiency legislation in California, signed by the Governor in May 2018, mindful of ongoing drought resulting from climate change, offers new guidance for the entire state, setting a desired standard of 55 gallons per day per person for indoor residential use.<sup>11</sup> (Note that this recommendation does not include irrigation. Also, it is not intended as an enforceable standard for individuals, but rather as a way to set targets for entire service areas.) There is some good news in that the Muir Beach community is already off to a good start, as we are doing slightly better per capita compared to neighboring communities (Bollinas, Stinson, MMWD) in terms of average per person water usage. But our usage still exceeds the new guidelines from the state of California. If we take September 2020’s meter reading as a snapshot, and assume a population of 300 (which may be a high estimate), we get a per-person average usage of 95 gal/day.

In practice, actual usage varies widely across the community, with a median household usage of about 5000 gallons per month (166 gallons per day), 10% of households using well over 10,000 gal/month (333 gallons per day), and 10% of households using under 2000 gal/month (67 gallons per day). HM and I, a two-person full-time household, have averaged 1325 gal/month in 2020 (44 gal/day, or 22 gal/day/person). Our usage is low, but we use as much water as we like, and we don’t irrigate at all, though the redwood trees harvest the fog and rain it down on us. We also refill the birdbaths on either side of the house every day, which are frequented by birds, deer, and foxes.

The MBCSD’s current policy for times of noticed conservation, such as right now, attempts to motivate conservation by assigning financial penalties to usage above 15,000 gallons per month (2,000 cubic feet per month, or 500 gallons per day). According to the 2002 MBCSD resolution, that threshold “has been determined as the consumption adequate for the reasonable use for *a family of six (6) persons* or twice the average family size within the District” [emphasis added].<sup>12</sup> While a few of the very highest water using households in the district are regularly using over 15,000 gal/month throughout the year, to date usage has always been reduced enough during conservation periods that the fine has never been assessed.

Water meters in Muir Beach are read every other month, and your water bill contains information about how much water each household uses over each two-month period.

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If you're curious to learn more about your own usage patterns, and you'd like to see a compilation of your monthly usage over the last two years and how it compares to other households, please email us at [water@muirbeachcsd.com](mailto:water@muirbeachcsd.com). For reference and perhaps for inspiration, the following table indicates what your usage would look like if your household were using 55 gallons per day per person:

persons in household	gal/day	gal/month	cubic feet per billing cycle	gallons per billing cycle
1	55	1650	441	3300
2	110	3300	882	6600
3	165	4950	1324	9900
4	220	6600	1765	13200
5	275	8250	2206	16500
6	330	9900	2647	19800

While we are currently meeting the requirements of our eighteen-year-old agreement and pumping less than 35,000 gallons/day as a community, we must continue to reevaluate in the face of extreme uncertainty. It remains open to debate whether this level is actually enough to ensure not just the health of the ecosystem around Redwood Creek, but the long-term viability of the entire aquifer as a water source for the

community years and decades — dare we think in centuries? — into the future. The question is more urgent given the recent finding that we may well be entering into a decades-long megadrought, a factor which was of course not taken into account in the research leading to the 2005 Adaptive Management Plan. A living document, that plan can change as we, as a community, see fit.

In the meantime, many resources are available to help each of us conserve water. One good source is the Marin Municipal Water District website, [marinwater.org](http://marinwater.org), under "Conservation". To help use water wisely in landscaping, for example, they have published a comprehensive handbook entitled *Watershed Approach to Landscaping*, which is available in your local library, as a free book, and as a PDF download.<sup>13</sup>

#### (Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup> <https://water.ca.gov/Water-Basics/Drought>

<sup>2</sup> A. Park Williams et al, 'Large contribution from anthropogenic warming to an emerging North American megadrought.' *Science*, 17 Apr 2020: Vol. 368, Issue 6488, pp. 314-318

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ppic.org/blog/californias-21st-century-megadrought/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bcpud.org/water-conservation-alerts/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.invernesspud.org/files/ba3be9d9b/Res.+255-2020+%28Water+Short+Emer%29+Signed+2020-07-22.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ppic.org/blog/californias-21st-century-megadrought> [emphasis added]

<sup>7</sup> [https://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/uv?site\\_no=11460151](https://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/uv?site_no=11460151)

<sup>8</sup> MBCSD Resolution for the Conservation of Water during Officially Noticed Water Conservation Periods, 2002, available on the MBCSD website under *Administration->District Records->Resolutions*.

<sup>9</sup> Darren Fong, David Manning, and Ben Becker. 'Evaluation of Fish and Habitat Characteristics near the Muir Beach Community Service District's Water Supply Well in Redwood Creek, Marin Co, California.' September 2007. National Park Service.

<sup>10</sup> Adaptive Management Plan, 2005, available on the MBCSD website under *Administration->District Records->Water*.

<sup>11</sup> Senate Bill 606 (Hertzberg) and Assembly Bill 1668 (Friedman). See also <https://www.acwa.com/news/correct-information-on-california-water-efficiency-laws/>

<sup>12</sup> MBCSD Resolution for the Conservation of Water during Officially Noticed Water Conservation Periods, 2002, available on the MBCSD website under *Administration->District Records->Resolutions*.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.marinwater.org/484/Watershed-Wise-Landscapes>

## MBVFD Update *By David Taylor*

Since the last issue of the Beachcomber, California has literally exploded with fire and fire related tragedy. Muir Beach has remained a sanctuary from this but as we saw one year ago with the Muir Fire our situation as rural Californians is fraught with peril. It is no longer a question of if there will be a fire in our community but rather when. How we prepare for our turn in the barrel will be a focus for the fire department and the community for years to come. Last month there was an initial meeting to set up a FireWise community organization that was very informative. We have had two chipper days to remove fuels and Chief Gove participates in the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (<https://www.marinwildfire.org/>). We now have four junior firefighters as Austin and Jackson Moore have started to participate in our drills. We hope that all residents of Muir Beach can join together to help protect our community from fire.

As we have been experiencing poor air quality and drifting smoke that blots out the sun during the hottest August and September on record I thought it would be helpful to speak to some members of our community who have actual experience on the fire lines. Graham Groneman and Jesse Rudnick both got their start and initial training as part of the MBVFD over twenty years ago and have gone on to have extraordinary and fulfilling careers in the fire service as part of the Marin County Fire Department. I interviewed Jesse and Graham and Brett Groneman (Graham's wife) about their experiences in the fire service, the impact of climate change on their lives and work and families and how Muir Beach should think about fire risk and preparedness.

Graham and Jesse started with MBVFD in 1998 and 1999 respectively when Mike Moore was the chief and an EMT course was offered at the community center by Santa Rosa JC. By 2001 they were both working as seasonal firefighters for Marin County Fire (MCFD) and are now in their twentieth fire season. MCFD doubles in size during the wildfire season from 100-200 firefighters. One of the reasons that a large seasonal force is required is to maintain staffing within the county during the fire season when resources are needed to provide mutual aid and send strike teams on campaign fires.

Both men find their work deeply meaningful. As a firefighter you see people on their "worst day ever" and try to help. Firefighters are welcomed into intense and painful situations all the time and try to improve the lives of their communities. The experience of working in their field means that as Graham says, "we all have two families – one at home and one at the firehouse" and their devotion to each family often comes at a cost to the other. As Jesse said it would be impossible to do this without the love and support of his friends and family. Here in Muir Beach the two Groneman households and the Rudnick Johnson household all endure long periods of anxiety and separation. The pandemic restrictions have made this even more difficult.

Jesse is a Captain at Woodacre and Graham is a Battalion Chief with responsibility for training programs and oversees B shift. Until about 2017 the fire season predictably ran from July to late October. In that year a series of disasters unfolded that has been the pattern for most subsequent years. At present seasonal firefighting

duties stretch from April to January and this has meant less time for other fire department work and training, collective exhaustion and a huge and exhausting burden for families.

2017 began and ended with water as Graham recounts. First in February the Oroville dam neared collapse due to intense rainfall and water rescues were needed. Later that same area was on fire and water was in short supply. In October the Wine Country fires destroyed a large area of Santa Rosa and the following month the Thomas Fire, which at the time was the largest fire in history, nearly destroyed parts of Santa Barbara and our firefighters barely made it home for Christmas. In January terrible mud slides punctuated the tragic year with more water and terrible destruction in the wake of the Thomas Fire.

Each year breaks new records. In 2018 the Camp Fire was the most destructive in history destroying 23,000 structures including the town of Paradise. In 2020 the Creek Fire was the largest single fire in history and the August Complex of fires has burned over a million acres. As Jesse points out the impact of years of drought on the Sierra forests plus invasive beetles created the intensely flammable desiccated forests that fueled the giant Creek Fire.

Staffing these fires has created an extreme environment for firefighters and their families with endless deployments and separations. Jesse has spent 8 of the past 10 weeks deployed on major fires. He began in July with the Mineral Fire in Fresno then moved to the Hog Fire in Susanville and then spent three weeks on the Woodward Fire here in Point Reyes.

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When working on a fire in county the firefighters are really never off duty. Many engines and teams were out of the county due to the 5000 lightning strikes in California in August and as a result the resources available to work in Point Reyes were skeletal at first. After the Woodward Fire he had two days off and then he and Graham went to join the fight on the August Complex in Humboldt. Right after returning from that he responded to the Glass Fire in Napa/Sonoma. Usually firefighters work 24 hours on followed by 24 hours off but during the Glass Fire Jesse was awake for 52 hours to work a 36 hour shift as so many homes were at risk.

Brett describes the challenges and hardships of fire season as a mother of two small children. At a moment's notice she becomes a single mother. While this is an experience shared by many firefighter families the rest of the community may be unaware. There is little formal support offered by the fire departments. She is very grateful to April Randle for arranging a meal train and people in the community have been helping out providing meals to the Groneman family. The pandemic has meant that arranging childcare has become nearly impossible. The creation of a Muir Beach play group pod has been a real boon. Being in a relationship with a firefighter has always meant being alone at summer events but now it also means that you may be separated during the winter holidays.

Graham and Jesse point out that Muir Beach is at risk for a wildfire event depending on the direction of the wind. Marin is a high risk area that experiences a low frequency of fires. Note that if the smoke blows toward you then the fire can come too. While



*Jesse on the radio*

we are fortunate to be bordered in part by the ocean a fire on Mt Tam or on the Panoramic Ridge could blow through the adjacent valleys very fast. This will mean that following



*Woodward Fire, Pt Reyes*

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## UPDATE ON TINY

*(See August 2020 of the Beachcomber for the original story. "Tiny and I.")*

*By Linda Gibbs*

I am happy to report that Tiny has survived infant hood and is now swimming with the big dogs: her parents Poppy and Frosty, and Buster our almost 50-year-old red-eared slider turtle. Tiny has lost her newborn dark gray coloring and has turned orange and white, favoring both parents. Her dad Poppy is orange colored and her mom Frosty is white.

At 4" long—she was less than an inch at birth—Tiny shows no fear and swims about her home with confidence. She is truly a Covid Time miracle.

evacuation orders and being prepared to evacuate rapidly is absolutely essential.

The current MBVFD team continues to benefit from the wisdom and experience of our most distinguished alumni and we are all grateful for the work they are doing. The MBVFD and the surrounding fire brigades of MCFD, Southern Marin and Mill Valley along with the newly created Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority must continue to work together via mutual aid as a fire anywhere in Southern Marin is a risk for all of us.



*Tiny with her parents Poppy and Frosty.  
Photo by Linda Gibbs*





Muir Beachers Isis and David Schwartz welcome their first grandchild, Arden Thomas Westhoff Schwartz, born on August 6th. Arden is the son of Muir Beach resident Anthony David Schwartz and his partner Allie Westhoff from Glenwood Springs, Colorado. The happy family lives in Portland, Oregon and the photo was taken at Topaz Farm on Sauvie Island, Portland.



Brett and Graham Groneman are delighted to announce the arrival of Charlie G's little sister, third generation Muir Beach resident, Hadley Sibley Groneman. A mini but mighty baby girl, she was born April 8, 2020 at 5:46 am, weighing 6 lbs 1 oz and measuring 19.5 inches long.

In dramatic Groneman fashion (Charlie was born during the 2018 Muir Beach flood), she arrived premature and following an intense pregnancy, she brought immediate life and light into the initial months of the COVID-19 epidemic. After a stressful month of hospitalizations, returning home to shelter in place with a healthy newborn baby girl never felt so good! We are eager to share Hadley with her Muir Beach community when the world allows. – *Brett Sibley*



August 16, 2020 lightning storm. Photo by Kim O'Connor (submitted by Jim White).