

# BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

John King, BPA President



**H**ello, Barron Park Neighbors! How are you all holding up as we experience an unprecedented and continuing series of events that have turned our lives upside down? The value of neighbors has never been more apparent than during these past months as we have stayed at home, worn masks, canceled trips and events, turned our extra rooms into offices and dining room tables into school-rooms. Neighbors have kept a lifeline open next door, nearby, and across streets, making life a little less isolated. It's neighbors whom you see walking to the park and at nearby shops and stores. It's neighbors who watch

out, alert you and bring your attention to perhaps unwanted solicitors coming to the door. It's neighbors who are mindful of other neighbors in need.

The Barron Park Association (BPA) Board continues to meet on Zoom and has approved many measures of support for our local causes. The BPA has authorized monetary and in-kind support for the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park, our neighborhood Seniors, neighbors in need, the Gunn High Foundation, Canopy Trees, Copy Factory, and our beloved Barron Park donkeys. Your continued support as members of the BPA keeps our Association's Newsletter, website, email lists, and community donations viable,

not to mention the fun social events we all need and will resume in the future.

Soon, we will go to the polls. Voters who decide to go to the polling venues (Vote Centers) will see neighborhood volunteers there. Remember to thank them for their service to the community. Amazingly, the next time I post this BPA President's Message, we will have the election results. What will I be able to write then?

Lastly, just to observe that when I go around the neighborhood, I am seeing most everyone wearing masks, being careful to socially distance, and doing their best to stay safe. I notice that our neighborhood parks and pathways are being used responsibly. In general, Barron Park is a shining example of how a neighborhood can respond to the type of year 2020 has presented to us. Personally, I appreciate living here and enjoying our good fortune. Stay Safe Barron Park!

Join the BPA or renew at: <http://bpapaloalto.org/join-the-barron-park-association/>

You can always reach me at: [president@bpapaloalto.org](mailto:president@bpapaloalto.org)

### View the Newsletter in Full Color!

You can read this issue in full color online at <http://bpapaloalto.org/bpa-newsletter/> as soon as it's posted. While you're there, check out our Archive of past Newsletters. Your small screen is an easy way to review past activities in the 'hood and catch up on issues you may have missed.

Thanks! The Editors



Susan Breitbard shares photos of some of her favorite pumpkins from Halloweens past. All photos courtesy of Susan Breitbard. See story and more photos on [Page 2](#).

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# Palo Alto Humane Society Donates for Donkey Care!

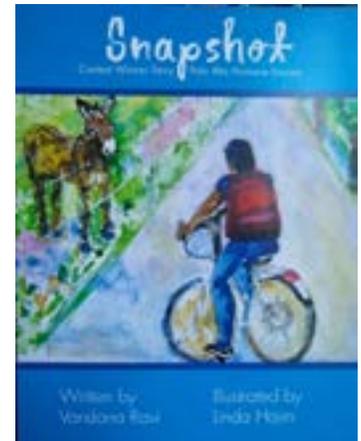
By Leonor Delgado, PAHS Education Manager



**September 1, 2020, at Bol Park: PAHS presents a “check” to the Bol Park Donkey Fund. From left to right: Carole Hyde, from PAHS; Michael Holland and Jenny Kiratli, from the donkey volunteer staff. Photo by Steven Shpall.**

Park residents have consistently provided donations to help their donkeys! Moreover, Perry and Jenny were happy and willing participants throughout the presentation!

Attendees at the event also included members of the donkey volunteer staff, among them, former Palo Alto mayor Karen Holman, PAHS friends and staff, and last year’s winner of PAHS Ambassadors of Compassion student story-writing contest, Vandana Ravi. Ms. Ravi spoke briefly about community concern for the donkeys’ well-being and the way in which they served as the inspiration for her winning story, “Snapshot.”



**Snapshot, published by P.A. Humane Society. Order at: [pahs@paloaltohumane.org](mailto:pahs@paloaltohumane.org) Photo by Leon Rochester.**

The afternoon of Tuesday, September 1, a small mask-wearing socially distanced group was in attendance at Bol Park as Palo Alto Humane Society (PAHS) presented a monetary donation to Acterra for the care of the Barron Park Donkeys. The donation will be used to help maintain the donkeys’ upkeep and provide ongoing veterinary care.

Jenny Kiratli, Care Coordinator for the two Barron Park donkeys, Perry and Jenny, explained that both donkeys have recently had eye infections and leg dermatitis and, for this reason, have required considerably more care than usual. PAHS generous gift of \$2,000 is earmarked for such treatment, now provided by Starwood Equine Veterinary Services in Redwood City. Annual expenses for donkey care usually range between \$10,000 and \$12,000, but this year, because of the extra necessary veterinary treatments, costs have been higher.

Upon receiving the PAHS donation, both Jenny Kiratli and Lauren Weston, Executive Director of Acterra, expressed their gratitude. Attendees were reminded that if they wished to contribute to the donkeys’ care, donations are always welcome and can be made at the donkeys’ website (<http://barronparkdonkeys.org/donate/>) or through Acterra (<https://www.acterra.org/donate-now>). If donating through Acterra, please indicate in the Comments box that your donation should be used to help the Barron Park Donkeys. Barron

PAHS has compiled Vandana’s story, along with selections about donkey care and rescue into a beautifully illustrated book called *Snapshot*, which was available for sale at the event. If readers are interested in obtaining a copy of the book (\$8), please contact PAHS at [pahs@paloaltohumane.org](mailto:pahs@paloaltohumane.org) or call us at (650) 424-1901.

The PAHS gift was generated through its Daisy Fund, a donor-supported program with the mission of providing veterinary care for needy animals, strays, and pets throughout the Mid-Peninsula. This year’s Fourth Annual Daisy’s Day is now underway. To learn about Daisy’s Day and how to contribute to help animals, visit: <https://www.paloaltohumane.org/daisys-day-2020/>.

## HAPPY HALLOWEEN!

By Susan Breitbard

Halloween unlocks imaginations as no other celebration does. I am struck by this as I look over 10 years of photographs from our family’s annual pumpkin-carving parties. I am always astonished by the ingenuity and skill shown by the participants.

Whether we drew from fears and phobias, or sense of humor, or depicted current heroes from fiction or politics, we carved these ideas onto our pumpkins. One year a Black Mamba snake was carved on a pumpkin, reminding us of a scary rumor earlier that summer that a Black Mamba had been seen in the Ross Road area of Palo Alto.

After the pumpkins were carved, we carried them outside, placed them in rows, and lit the candles. The spectacle always brought forth exclamations of delight. We then serenaded them with every ghoulish song we could think of.



**More fabulous pumpkins!**



# Election and Voting Information for the November 3 General Election

Information Provided by Jean Lythcott

**Vote Safely! Vote by Mail! Vote Early! Every Registered Voter in CA will receive a Vote-by-Mail Ballot.**

Check your registration status here: <https://eservices.sccgov.org/Rov?tab=vr>

Register to vote here: <https://registertovote.ca.gov>

## Where's my Ballot?

- Sign up to track your ballot -- when it was mailed, received, and counted: <https://california.ballottrax.net/voter>
- Ballots will be mailed to all registered voters in CA on October 5.

## Three ways to return your Vote by Mail Ballot (don't forget to sign the return envelope!)

- In the U.S. Mail, using the postage paid return envelope
- In an Official Drop Box
- At Vote Centers, open for four days, October 31–November 3 (Election Day).

## Go to a Vote Center if you need:

- Accessible voting equipment
- A replacement ballot
- To register to vote and cast a ballot
- To get help and voting material in multiple languages
- To drop off your ballot or vote in-person.

## 24-Hour Official Drop Box Locations, October 5–November 3 (until 8 P.M. on Election Day, November 3):

- Palo Alto City Hall
- Palo Alto High School
- Mitchell Park Library
- Rinconada Branch Library

## Locations of Vote Centers

- Cubberley Community Center - Gym A
- Mitchell Park Community Center - Adobe Room
- Palo Alto Art Center - Auditorium
- Rinconada Library - Embarcadero Room
- Ventura Community Center - Activity Center

## Get the Facts Before You Vote: Nonpartisan Ballot Information You Can Trust

Voters Edge California: <https://votersedge.org/ca>

## Work at a Vote Center

- Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters: <https://www.sccgov.org/sites/rov/Volunteer/Work%20at%20a%20Vote%20Center/Pages/home.aspx>
- Power the Polls: <https://www.powerthepolls.org>

## Useful Websites for Voter Information

- League of Women Voters of Palo Alto: <https://www.lwvpaloalto.org>
- Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters: <https://www.sccgov.org/sites/rov/Pages/Registrar-of-Voters.aspx>
- CA Secretary of State: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections>



# PREPARING FOR HOME ELECTRIFICATION:

## *Transitioning from Natural Gas to Slow Down Climate Change*

By Hilary Glann

**D**roughts, heat waves, and unprecedented wildfires are clear indicators that we are already experiencing the harsh impacts of climate change. According to climate scientists, reducing the use of natural gas in our homes and businesses during the next decade is essential to reducing the rate of global warming and limiting temperature rise.

Far from being a ‘clean’ fossil fuel, the production and combustion of natural gas/methane represents one-third of California greenhouse gas emissions. Methane leaks during extraction, transmission, and usage have 80 times the warming impact of CO<sub>2</sub>.<sup>1</sup> Gas pipeline explosions cause an annual average of 15 fatalities, 57 injuries, and over \$300 million in property damage in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> Inside the home, gas-powered household appliances produce harmful indoor air pollution, including ultra-fine particles.<sup>3</sup> Gas combustion can be lethal without proper venting, resulting in an annual average 50,000 emergency room visits and at least 430 deaths in the U.S.<sup>4</sup>

I spoke with Scott Mellberg, Palo Alto native and program manager at the City of Palo Alto Utilities (CPAU), to learn more about what CPAU is doing to help residents transition from natural gas to electricity as their gas equipment reaches its end of life.

*Scott, what is the City of Palo Alto Utilities plan for natural gas?*

City of Palo Alto Utilities for the foreseeable future will continue to provide natural gas to our customers in a safe and reliable system. However, our City Council and community have committed to our Sustainability and Climate Action Plan (S/CAP), which is driven by California’s climate actions and our own city’s climate goals. To achieve those goals, we need to significantly reduce our use of natural gas in this next decade to avoid even worse impacts from climate change. Palo Alto residents are fortunate because we have a public utility, which is empowered to act for the good of the community, not for shareholders. CPAU is committed to providing incentives, services, and resources to help our residents transition in a cost-effective and community benefitting way from gas-

powered to electric-powered homes.



**Scott Mellberg, Program Manager, City of Palo Alto Utilities (CPAU). Photos courtesy of Scott Mellberg.**

*Most of our homes are set up for gas-powered systems, not for electric ones. Many of us invested in high efficiency gas-powered space and water heaters, which could last another 10 years or more. How do we make this transition?*

The first thing is to do is to take an inventory of your existing gas-powered systems – furnace, water heater, stove, and clothes dryer – and then figure out their age and condition. Knowing the state and age of your water heater is especially important because it can leak or stop working with no warning, especially after 8-10 years of service.

Next, you’ll need to get your home ready for electrification: you want to set up your infrastructure now so you can have an electric circuit in place for your new electric appliance when your gas one needs replacing.

To be ready, some older homes may need an upgrade of the main electric service panel. If you have a new home, solar panels, or did a major remodel on your home in the last 5-10 years, you most likely already have an electric panel that can accommodate more electric appliances. By the way, if you install solar panels in 2020, you can deduct 26% of the cost of the solar panels and the new main electric panel from your Federal income taxes (check with your tax advisor on this). The Federal tax deduction drops to 21% in 2021.

*This sounds like it is going to take work and money. How will the Utilities department help me get my house “Electrification Ready”?*

We have a terrific free resource in the Home Efficiency Genie advisor to help you develop your electrification readiness plan. In addition to equipment and contractor recommendations, they might advise you to add more insulation, for example, which is a very inexpensive way to reduce your total energy needs and improve the home’s comfort. When COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, we will resume in-home services including Home Electrification Readiness Assessments and our Genie Whole Home Assessments. We’re currently investigating other incentives, education, and services to help residents get electrification ready.



**Upgraded main electric service panel.**

*I’ve heard that heat pump solutions work really well in a new or typical home in Palo Alto – but not so well if you don’t have a garage, or your garage isn’t attached, or you have an Eichler or other slab-on-grade home. What is the solution there?*

Fortunately, there are a number of very efficient and flexible heat pump solutions available for air heating/cooling and water heating that will work for almost every home.

If you are considering adding air conditioning as our climate heats up and have only a gas furnace now, when you convert to an electric heat pump system, you will be adding air conditioning in the same unit, which is a great advantage of converting to heat pump systems.

CPAU and the Genie want to work with residents to figure out the best solution for their homes. Contact the Home Energy Genie, and they will walk through your options. They also have a list of contractors who are experienced with electrical projects in the City of Palo Alto.

*So, what about disaster preparedness? I'm worried about being reliant on just one fuel source.*

Modern gas-powered appliances rely on electricity, so you can't run them when the power is out. You should not operate any gas stove without using your range hood fan because carbon monoxide will be released into your home. All gas tankless water heaters and many gas tank water heaters do not run without electricity. Gas-powered generators are dangerous – half the deaths from Hurricane Laura were caused by improper use of gas generators.<sup>5</sup> Residents should look for solutions that can provide emergency electricity to their home. If you have solar power, or even if you don't, consider adding solar

battery storage. Battery costs are coming down in price and can provide enough power to run the necessities in your home during a power outage. Or, if you have an electric car, you can draw power from the battery. Companies are offering electric car chargers that can also work in reverse to pull electricity from your EV car during a blackout.

*Any additional advice for Barron Park residents?*

We have online resources to get you started on your electrification journey. Please visit our electrification website at: [https://cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/utl/pathway\\_to\\_sustainability/electrification/default.asp](https://cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/utl/pathway_to_sustainability/electrification/default.asp)

And to learn more about upgrading your electrical panel, visit: [https://cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/utl/pathway\\_to\\_sustainability/electrification/electric\\_panel\\_upgrade/default.asp](https://cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/utl/pathway_to_sustainability/electrification/electric_panel_upgrade/default.asp)

You can always call or email the Home Efficiency Genie at (650) 713-3411, or email [advisor@efficiencygenie.com](mailto:advisor@efficiencygenie.com) if you have a

question.

**Footnotes:**

1. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/08/fracking-boom-tied-to-methane-spike-in-earths-atmosphere/>
2. <https://www.phmsa.dot.gov/data-and-statistics/pipeline/pipeline-incident-20-year-trends>
3. <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/resources/documents/combustion-pollutants-indoor-air-quality>
4. <https://www.cdc.gov/dotw/carbonmonoxide/index.html>
5. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/02/us/generator-deaths-hurricane-laura-trnd/index.html>

**Other Resources:**

- <https://www.vox.com/energy-and-environment/21349200/climate-change-fossil-fuels-rewiring-america-electrify>
- <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/environmental-impacts-natural-gas>

# Nature's Wonderful Ingredients: Fenugreek Seeds

By Jaya Pandey, Barron Park Green Beans Committee



**Fenugreek seeds, soaking. Photos by Jaya Pandey.**

**F**enugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum* L.) is a commonly used spice in India and is considered to have many health benefits. This plant belongs to the legume family. Fenugreek seeds are known to be rich in saponins and coumarins – chemicals associated with many health benefits, such as reducing blood sugar and cholesterol levels.

Fenugreek seeds and leaves are a vital part of Indian cooking and are utilized in many Indian dishes.

Here are several easy ways to use fenugreek seeds/leaves and to include them in your cooking:

- Soak fenugreek seeds overnight in water. The next day, sauté 4 cups finely chopped cabbage in 2-3 tablespoons of olive oil, 1/2 tablespoon of mustard seeds (make sure they are roasted well before adding the cabbage), finely chopped green chilies to taste, and 1-2 tablepoons of soaked fenugreek seeds. Cook on medium heat until cabbage is soft, and add a dash of crushed black peppers and salt to taste. Cabbage may be substituted with green beans, cauliflower, or any vegetable of your choice.
- Finely roasted and powdered fenugreek seeds can be mixed with flax seeds and used in salads as a topping – in moderation.
- One can grow the plants in the kitchen garden after sprouting the fenugreek seeds. Add the fresh green leaves to any mixed green sauté for a unique flavor.

- The dried green leaves may be stored and used in any curry of your choice to add extra flavor.



**Sautéed cabbage, with soaked fenugreek seeds, mustard seed and chilies.**

# MY EFFORTS TO GROW MONARCH BUTTERFLIES: *A Real Gardening Challenge!*

By Jefferson Burch



**A Monarch caterpillar on a Narrowleaf Milkweed plant. Photos by Jeff Burch.**

This past summer was year three of my adventure in trying to grow Monarch butterflies in and around Bol Park. I was inspired to undertake this project during the summer of 2016 when a single Monarch caterpillar grew on an existing Narrowleaf Milkweed plant along the pathway by the Matadero bridge. During that summer I watched the single caterpillar grow, checking on its progress every evening while walking my dogs.

One evening, searching with my flashlight, I couldn't find it on any of the Milkweed branches! My fear that it had suffered a calamity luckily ended when I found a beautiful jeweled chrysalis on a nearby wooden stake. Apparently, many caterpillars will leave their host plant to form their chrysalis – to make it harder for predators to find them. This Monarch larva only had 10-14 days to go . . . Would it make it to adulthood?

On September 30, just after 11 p.m., she – a female, with thicker black lines and no round black dots – emerged from her chrysalis and pumped up her wings to dry. It was cold, and

she was barely moving. The next morning, I jumped out of bed to get back to the bridge to see if she had made it through the night. To my delight, she was still there, patiently waiting for the sun's warmth before making her maiden flight.

Earlier that summer, I had established a butterfly garden on the property of some friends on Roble Ridge. Their two raised beds had been fallow for more than a decade. In early September, other neighbors joined me to refurbish the raised beds.



**An adult female Monarch butterfly.**

Since that start, that garden has been planted with about 50 native Milkweed plants (host plant for the caterpillars) and companion native flowers to attract and nourish the females. Recently, two new raised beds were added along with a drip irrigation system.

I've now expanded my Milkweed planting to the margins of Bol Park along the shared pathway. I'm experimenting with different microhabitats to learn what conditions are optimum for this plant. So far, I perfected my Milkweed sprouting skills, learned that gophers don't seem to like them, that they hate exposure to hot afternoon sun, and realized that they want significantly more water than I anticipated!

At the start of each growing season, my Milkweeds emerge from winter dormancy. Hopefully in a month or so, Monarch females will fly in and deposit eggs. Hopefully, we will grow lots of caterpillars every summer!

If you see any Monarch butterflies in Bol Park, please send me a photo with these details:

- Was it a male (thin black lines on the wings with a small black dot on each lower wing), or a female (thicker black lines on wings, no dot)?
- Where in the park?
- What time of day?
- How many butterflies?
- How long did you watch them?
- Where did they go?
- Were they feeding on flowers?
- If so, what kind of flower?
- And most importantly, if it was a female, did she lay any eggs?

If you would like to help in this project or learn more about Monarch butterflies or native Milkweed, please contact me: [Jefferson.Burch@gmail.com](mailto:Jefferson.Burch@gmail.com)

## **Winter BPA Newsletter Deadline – Tuesday, December 1, 2020!**

To Our Valued Past and Future Contributors:

Please submit articles and drafts (preferably in Microsoft Word) for the Winter issue of the Barron Park Association Newsletter, along with photos/illustrations (separate from text), by Tuesday, December 1, 2020, to Myrna Rochester, [mbrbpa@sonic.net](mailto:mbrbpa@sonic.net)

If your Winter idea is a query—for an article, story, report, update, interview, announcement, review, anecdote, or artist's page—please contact us in advance. The Winter issue will be mailed in early January 2021, to BPA member households.

Announcements should be for events scheduled after January 15, 2021. Please keep this in mind, especially – and hopefully! – for school activities. Thanks!

# Hungry Caterpillars to Floating Butterflies

By John Richards

A female Monarch was fluttering around our Milkweed plants, but this time was different. I followed her to a small plant and watched her curve her abdomen around to the underside of a leaf. After she left, I flipped the leaf over to find a tiny white egg, and from that moment on I was hooked!

My internet search confirmed that what I'd found was a Monarch egg, and after doing a more thorough inspection of the plants, I found three more. One internet source on Monarchs estimated that only one in ten Monarch eggs ever reach maturity. I wondered if the chances for success would be better if I tried raising them indoors.

I found a Monarch enthusiast on YouTube named Rich Lund, a high school teacher who releases hundreds of Monarchs every year from eggs collected in the wild. Following Lund's methods, I placed the leaves the eggs were attached to in a plastic container with a clear lid. When the caterpillars hatched, I provided fresh Milkweed daily.

Eating voraciously, they grew quickly, and when they reached the phase just prior to becoming chrysalides, I moved them to a clean terrarium with a screened lid. (At this stage the caterpillar is large and plump, with front legs smaller than the others and closer to the head.) Like clockwork, the caterpillars stopped eating and migrated to the top, where they attached themselves with silk.



**A plump Monarch caterpillar in its last stage before becoming a chrysalis. Photos by John Richards.**

After about a day, light green chrysalides burst from within the caterpillars' outer skin. Wow!

Following Lund's suggestion, I removed the chrysalides from the screens and fastened them, evenly spaced, to a string. This gives

the butterflies room to unfurl their wings properly.



**A Monarch chrysalis (propagated indoors).**

Approximately ten days later, we awoke to find one butterfly struggling to emerge; its abdomen was stuck in the chrysalis shell. After watching it labor for some time, I took tweezers and gently tugged on the tip of the shell as the butterfly stood on my daughter's hand. Without much trouble the butterfly was freed, but its abdomen was malformed, its left forewing had folded over on itself, and a few minutes later a yellowish droplet formed at the end where it had been attached. It had been a difficult birth. We let him (I identified him as male by his black spots) rest on a plant indoors.

Shortly after this, Chrysalis #2 opened and a butterfly slipped out ever so smoothly, crawled upward and began pumping fluid into its wings. This one looked quite robust. When it began flapping its wings, we took it outside; up it sailed, into the wind. Success!

Monarchs don't have much interest in food on their first day, but that night I felt maybe some sustenance would benefit Butterfly #1. I mixed up a solution of honey and water, gently grasped the thorax of the insect with my left hand, and with a very steady right hand I placed a toothpick under his proboscis and unfurled it down into the solution. On my third attempt, he got a good drink. By now his abdomen had extended to a more



**Butterfly just emerged; note the discarded chrysalis (casing).**

normal length and he was no longer leaking any fluids.

The next morning, Butterfly #3 emerged without incident and was released. (Butterfly #4 never emerged.) I fed #1 again and took him outside. He fluttered to the ground, weakly. I placed him on some flowers in the sun. A few hours later he was gone. I checked the ground beneath where he'd been perched. To my surprise, nothing.

Four days later, however, my daughter was in the front yard when a Monarch fluttered past. She identified it clearly as #1 by the folded forewing. How unlikely . . . but good for him! So, what was our success rate? It might be too generous to say 75%. At any rate, I'm hopeful that next year we'll get a shot at using what we've learned to help the Monarchs again.



**"Our" adult female.**

# Racial Segregation in Barron Park

By Douglas L. Graham, Barron Park Historian

## What is “The Race Problem” in the United States?

This is Part One of a two-part article. It concentrates on the story of how our neighborhood became segregated. To seriously consider the issue, we must first turn to an understanding of systemic racism and its history in the United States, California, and Palo Alto. That would take a book, or several books, so, for our immediate purposes, we must pass fleetingly over these difficult topics. Many good and best-selling books have been written, including several recently. You’ll find a selection of titles at the end.

A quote that sticks in my mind is from author Richard Wright who said: “There isn’t any Negro problem; there is only a white problem.” I also offer the following from author James Baldwin, quoted in *Time Magazine* on May 17, 1963: “At the root of the Negro Problem is the necessity of the white man to find a way of living with the negro in order to live with himself.”

## Ground Rules

My ground rules are simple: (1) I do not believe that “race” is genetically determined (even though physical traits are); (2) Many late 20th and 21st century historians and writers have come to understand that race is a culturally determined construct of fairly recent origin, invented in Europe rather late in the 17th century and “refined” by the end of the 19th century. We of course know the horrible consequences for Africa, Europe, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas in the 19th and 20th centuries. And we are not “out of the woods” yet! (3) I shall refer to “Blacks” as “African-Americans” and other so-called “non-whites” as “people of color.” If you do not like these labels, please appreciate that I did not invent them, but I believe they may currently be the least offensive labels that would be generally understood; (4) I believe that the people whom whites used to call “mixed race” might prefer today to be referred to as “multi-racial,” so shall use that term in this story; (5) As much as is possible, I will try to write this article as a dispassionate description of history and current affairs, knowing it is not possible to avoid bias with such a high-voltage topic. Please bear with

me and do not TP my house.

## The Current “Race” Situation in Barron Park

Despite current attitudes and the conscious beliefs of today’s residents, our neighborhood, from the standpoint of African-Americans, remains almost 100% segregated. However, the approximately 99% majority is not all white by classical standards. There are a few people of color (I don’t know how many), and there are many residents of Asian-American and Asian heritage, including a significant percentage of recent immigrants. There are a few Pacific Islanders and not very many Latinx people (except in Buena Vista Mobile Home Park). Even fewer of our residents are of acknowledged Native American heritage. The few African-Americans (and probably at least some neighbors in other groups) could tell you about recent racially discriminatory words and even some actions directed against them by people in the white majority. I am not suggesting that this discrimination has increased; I think it has probably slowly decreased. *But it still happens here.*

## How Barron Park Was Developed as a Segregated Neighborhood

On December 11, 1919 – during the Great Flu Pandemic of 1918-20 – the 66-year-old Barron Estate of 350 acres was sold to J. E. Reiter, R. F. Driscoll, and B. L. Driscoll, Watsonville capitalists and strawberry growers. They proceeded to subdivide the property into 2- to 6-acre plots and sold them to people who the group hoped would become contract strawberry growers for the Driscoll Company. By about 1925-26, most or all of the plots had been sold, except for parts of the oak-covered hilly areas we now call “Roble Ridge” and “Matadero Hill,” considered unsuitable for strawberry farming.

As early as the spring of 1920, houses were springing up along several unpaved lanes (now Matadero, Los Robles, and Laguna Avenues) that gave access to the parts of the estate west of the immediate frontage along the State Highway (which later became U.S. Route 101, named El Camino Real). Driscoll and Reiter sold land only to white people (although one plot near the intersection of the future La Para and Laguna Avenues

was later occupied by a Japanese-American family).

## Racial Exclusionary Clauses in Barron Park Deeds

At some point – most likely from the beginning, all the Driscoll and Reiter subdivisions were sold or resold with deeds that limited sales (and even occupancy) to persons of “the white race.” An example is shown in the box on page 9, a true copy of the exclusionary clause in the deed for 3798 Laguna Avenue, that was the home of Nick and Sally Babick. Today, any such restrictions shown that may violate state and federal housing laws are void.

Several white Barron Parkers have asked me how they could get these clauses removed from their deeds. *The Mercury News* ran a story by Marisa Kendall on August 8, 2020, about California Assemblyman Kevin McCarthy’s current efforts to introduce a bill that would remove racial covenants from real estate documents throughout California. Such agreements were common in the 1930s and ‘40s, and though they were deemed illegal by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1948, they remain on the books because there is no mechanism in California to completely remove them. The proposed legislation follows a similar attempt that passed the legislature but was vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger.

## Example of a Racial Exclusionary Clause in Barron Park Deed

The following paragraphs were written by me as part of an article in the Winter 2009 issue of this Newsletter and slightly modified by me for this article. Nothing in the clause has been changed since the 2009 publication. I attest that everything in the clause is a true copy of the Title Insurance, made by me.

It is interesting to note that the restriction had a “sunset clause,” 25 years from the “date of deed,” March 31, 1930 – meaning that it lapsed in 1955.

## How Segregated Are We? (“Breaking News”)

As I was completing the first draft of this article, on September 1, *The New York Times* online reprinted a *Stanford News* article by May Wong, “How Segregated

The title insurance issued to Nick Babick on November 15, 1954, for his property at 3798 Laguna Avenue referred to a Deed of Trust for \$5,400.00. County taxes were \$156.70 for the year. Schedule B, Part Two, shows “liens, encumbrances, defects, and other matters affecting the title to said land or to which said title is subject.” The second item covers “Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions.” There is an express provision for forfeiture and reversion of title in event of violation thereof, contained in the deed from J. E. Reiter *et al*, to Earl Young *et ux*, dated March 31, 1930, recorded April 7, 1930, in Book 514 Official Records, page 265, as follows:

“The following restrictions are hereby agreed to between the Sellers and Purchasers: That no person or persons other than those of the Caucasian or White Race shall use or occupy said premises or any part thereof, at any time prior to 25 years from date of Deed of said property, except that this provision shall not prohibit the employment of servants of any race; and provided further that any breach of any of the foregoing conditions shall cause said premises to revert to the Sellers (full copy).”

Comments: (1) This deed restriction may have been a standard provision in all of the sales that Driscoll and Reiter made while subdividing the old Barron Estate in the 1920s and early 1930s. (2) Earl Young was the “Y” of the EMWAY Water Company and had evidently sold the property to Eastus (the “E” in EMWAY) at some time between 1930 and 1941 when Nick Babick bought it.

Are We?”, about a study using GPS data to analyze people’s movements. Wong writes: “The researchers found that in most U.S. metropolitan areas, people’s day-to-day experiences are less segregated than traditional measures suggest. People spend a lot of time outside their neighborhoods. And when they do, they are more likely to encounter greater diversity than they find at home. The findings suggest that standard measures overstate the overall extent of segregation in the U.S., but it does not mean segregation is less of a problem, the researchers say. The study, in fact, finds that residential segregation and experienced segregation across cities are highly correlated (where one is higher – or lower – the other is also). The authors found that: Residential segregation can result in differences in many other dimensions, including social interactions as well as access to shopping and employment.”

**“Systemic” or “Structural” Racism Briefly Explained**

This might be a good time to back up and clarify the title of this story. “Systemic Racism” is an old phenomenon but one that has only recently been recognized and given a name. It means racism that is built into the systems by which and under which our society is organized – our government, the economic system, the social system, and dominant social values and beliefs. We could just as well call it “Built-in Racism.”

As Robin DiAngelo (who is white) says in her

groundbreaking book *White Fragility – Why It Is So Hard For White People To Talk About Racism*, “Race will influence whether we survive our birth, where we are most likely to live, which schools we will attend, who our friends and partners will be, what careers we will have, how much money we will earn, how healthy we will be, and even how long we can expect to live.” She might well have added to that list: “. . . and whether we will survive an encounter with police.”

**Government Segregation in the U.S.**

Richard Rothstein (for the record, he is white) wrote in his stunning book *The Color of Law – A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*: “. . . until the last quarter of the twentieth century, racially explicit policies of federal, state, and local governments defined where whites and African-Americans should live. Today’s residential segregation in the North, South, Midwest, and West is not the unintended consequence of individual choices and of otherwise well-meaning law or regulation but of unhidden public policy that explicitly segregated every metropolitan area in the United States. The policy was so systematic and forceful that its effects endure to the present time. Without our government’s purposeful imposition of racial segregation, the other causes – private prejudice, white flight, real estate steering, bank redlining, income differences, and self-segregation – still would have existed but with far less opportunity for expression. Segregation by

government action is not de facto. Rather, it is what the courts call *de jure*: segregation by law and public policy.”

**California’s Racist Background**

Contrary to popular belief, California has a long and ugly history of racial discrimination and segregation. It started with the U.S. conquest of California during the Mexican War, 1845-47. The Mexican citizens then inhabiting the state were less racially prejudiced than the U.S. citizens then beginning to arrive on foot by emigration across the plains and mountains. But even those “Californios” were prejudiced against the Native American inhabitants, whom they tended to treat like slaves.

When the U.S. took over, we brought our prejudices with us. In 1848, the Gold Rush began, and the world poured in: Americans on foot or by sailing ship around the Horn or through Panama; Australians, Peruvians, Columbians, Chileans, and more Mexicans; then, Europeans and Asians, especially Chinese. By 1850 when California became a state, it was a roiling mixture representing four continents (Africa was still very underrepresented). Early in our statehood history, the California legislature and California cities and towns began legislating against virtually all “non-whites.” The Chinese (and later, the Japanese) were the main targets. Even later, the targets became Mexicans, even the Californios, who had been here generations longer than anyone except the Native Americans. Most cities set up “Chinatowns” and “Mexican sections,” and schools were rigidly segregated (“White” and “Mexican”), especially in the early 20th century in Southern California. By then, African-Americans were arriving in significant numbers and they also got separately segregated in school and usually in residential areas. It was a “zoo” of prejudice and discrimination, sometimes violent. “Chinatowns” often got burned down deliberately to drive the people away, immigrants and citizens alike. There is no room in this article for a thorough or even adequate treatment of this subject.

**Discrimination in Los Angeles**

However, I can relate my personal experiences with the discrimination against “Mexicans.” When my family moved to Los Angeles from Rochester, New York, in 1947, we came right up against it. Dad had lived in the San Fernando Valley as a boy, during

the 1920s, and thought it was the best place to locate. When we arrived in Van Nuys to house-hunt right after Labor Day, my mother was intent on getting us kids in school as soon as possible. (My brother was going into eighth grade, I was to be in fifth, and my sister was starting first grade.) We wanted to start in Van Nuys, within easy reach of our motel, but were astonished to hear that the “white” schools were jammed full, and they wouldn’t let us go to the “Mexican” school a few blocks away. We had spent two winters in Florida, so knew segregation, but were amazed to hit it in California, which we had thought was racism-free. All I can say was that we were naïve and ignorant of the realities. During the years I spent growing up in Reseda (1947-55), we were never in any social situation with “Mexicans” (who were considered “shiftless and dirty”) until I got to high school, where the dominant “whites” shunned them.

### Discrimination in Palo Alto

Since we had lived in Rochester, New York, during World War Two, my family never heard much about the “Relocation” program (read: “concentration camps”) for Japanese and Japanese-Americans, the vast majority of whom were “relocated” from California. Matt Bowling has included a chapter on the Japanese-American internment here, in his book *Palo Alto Remembered – Stories from a City’s Past*. The Palo Alto residents caught up in this inhumane program often had less than a week to sell their homes and farms or businesses. There was at least one Japanese family uprooted from Barron Park – vegetable and strawberry farmers living on La Para Avenue. I have never been able to find out their names, even though I did extensive research on this in the 1980s and ‘90s.

The KKK had an active chapter in Palo Alto in 1924. Bowling has described its rise and the peak of its influence in the 1920s in his chapter called *Housing Discrimination – A Closed Door in Palo Alto*. He covers many of the discriminatory actions proposed by otherwise “respectable” Palo Alto groups to segregate African-Americans in the 1920s and 1940s. Every possible legal (but unconstitutional) method was suggested to create “ghettos” (never called that, of course). After World War Two, there were still at least three small African-American neighborhoods, two near downtown and one in South Palo Alto.

In 1969 when my wife and I moved to Palo Alto, there were quite a few African-Americans living across El Camino Real from Barron Park in Ventura. We got to know one family there in the 1980s, when our daughter became friends with their daughter through day care and school connections. Nowadays, I rarely see African-Americans in Ventura, which has greatly “gentrified” since the turn of the millennium.

### People of East and South Asian Background

I originally meant to include some interviews with Barron Parkers of Asian background, and also a section about their experiences integrating into Palo Alto and Barron Park, but I ran out of time. I hope to follow up with this in a future article.

### Real Estate Steering

Matt Bowling quotes a 1956 article in the *Palo Alto Times* about redlining and real estate steering: “. . . one Burlingame realtor bluntly told (us): ‘It’s pretty well proven that when Negroes come in, property values drop. It is quite a determining factor when I realize I am going to cost my neighbors two or three thousand dollars.’ . . . Doug Couch, president of Palo Alto’s Board of Realtors, said: ‘If you do sell to Negroes, everyone else is down your throat.’ Couch’s estimate of attitudes in Palo Alto was pretty accurate. A 1952 survey by the Palo Alto Fair Play Council reported that only 68 Palo Altoans polled would rent to a person of good character regardless of race while 198 would rent to Caucasians only.”

### Blockbusting in East Palo Alto

In 1954 there was an infamous “blockbusting” incident in East Palo Alto described in Richard Rothstein’s *Color of Law*. He defines blockbusting as: “. . . a scheme in which speculators bought properties in borderline black-white areas; rented or sold them to African-American families at above-market prices; persuaded white families in these areas that their neighborhoods were turning into African-American slums and that values would soon fall precipitously; and then purchased the panicked whites’ homes for less than their worth.”

According to Rothstein, one of these schemes was initiated in 1954 after one resident of a whites-only area in East Palo Alto sold his house to an African-American family. The scheme was managed by Floyd Lowe, president of the California Real Estate

Association: “He and other agents warned that a ‘Negro invasion’ was imminent and that it would result in collapsing property values. Soon, growing numbers of white owners succumbed to the scaremongering and sold at discounted prices to the agents and their speculators. African-Americans, desperate for housing, purchased the homes at inflated prices. Within six years, the population of East Palo Alto was 82 percent black.”

### Should Barron Park Stay Segregated?

Fortunately for today’s residents and would-be residents, redlining by banks and mortgage companies, real estate steering, and blockbusting by realtors are now illegal and generally considered to be highly unethical, so we should not fear them. Unfortunately, other barriers to entry by African-Americans still exist – the most significant being the extraordinarily high purchase prices of homes here. It is almost as if there were signs at all entrances to Palo Alto (including Barron Park) saying “only well-to-do or wealthy people should apply to live here.” Another possible barrier is an apparent lack of interest among well-to-do African-American and multi-racial people to buy into neighborhoods where the vast majority of residents are perceived as white or Asian.

Part Two of this article will appear in the Winter 2020 issue. It will concentrate on recent experiences of racism in Barron Park. You can reach me at [dgrahampaca@gmail.com](mailto:dgrahampaca@gmail.com), 650-493-0689, or Douglas L. Graham, 784 Ilima Way, Palo Alto, CA 94306. I would especially like to hear from you if you can supply either documentary or personal experience with housing discrimination and/or racist speech or actions by individuals in Barron Park.

### References

1. *White Fragility – Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, by Robin DiAngelo (Beacon Press, 2018)
2. *The Color of Law – A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, by Richard Rothstein (Liveright, 2018)
3. *Real American: A Memoir*, by Julie Lythcott-Haims (St. Martin’s Griffin, 2018)
4. *Palo Alto Remembered – Stories From a City’s Past*, by Matt Bowling (Palo Alto Historical Association, 2012)

# Return of the Bluebirds

By Jeralyn Moran



Female Western Bluebird, [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Western\\_Bluebird/overview](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Western_Bluebird/overview)

If, like many of us, you have been spotting bluebirds – the Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*) – in the yards and open spaces of Barron Park lately, it’s not a coincidence. In steep decline for decades, due to the DDT eradication of insects and competition for cavity nesting sites with non-native European starlings and house sparrows, Bluebirds are making a strong comeback. Dedicated volunteers, such as those with the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society’s Cavity Nesters Recovery Program (<https://scvas.org/cnrp>), build and install Bluebird nest boxes, and also monitor and report their progress, which has been considerable!

Bluebirds, in the order of *Passeriformes* of the thrush family, live in open woodlands and at the edges of woods. They tend to hunt for insects that are on the ground (grasshoppers, caterpillars, beetles, ants, wasps, and pill-bugs, even spiders and snails). You’ll often see them perched on a low tree branch, fence rail, or fence post, swooping down to grab that insect, then flying back up to the perch to eat it.

When the weather gets colder and live insects are harder to find, Bluebirds will eat seeds and/or fruits (even berries from the poison oak plant!). You may get lucky and catch a glimpse of one or a pair in your own backyard or the Strawberry Hill area adjacent to Gunn High School.



Male Western Bluebird, [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Western\\_Bluebird/overview](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Western_Bluebird/overview)

A male and female Bluebird pair will search for nest sites together, considering holes in trees that a woodpecker may have made in a prior year, or a natural hole where a tree branch once was. They are also happy to move into human-supplied nest boxes. Aggressive, non-native cavity nesters like house sparrows and European starlings continue to try to take over many of the nest sites that Western Bluebirds might otherwise use . . . not good.

Adult Bluebirds usually return to the same breeding territory year after year, but only a few (3 to 5 %) of their babies return to where they hatched. Outside the breeding season, Western Bluebirds are quite social, forming flocks up to 100 (!), sometimes mingling with Mountain Bluebirds or other species.

Scientists have noted that climate change is

hurting the Bluebird, like so many birds, due to habitat loss from wildfires and spring heat that endangers the babies. So, let’s help our feathered neighbors by minimizing our burning of fossil fuels!

References:

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Western\\_Bluebird/lifehistory](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Western_Bluebird/lifehistory)

<https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/western-bluebird>

<https://www.kqed.org/science/29607/western-bluebird-populations-expand-in-the-bay-area>

## BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

FALL 2020

**Barron Park Association**

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Palo Alto, California 94306

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Prodigy Press

## CALL FOR ARTISTS!



Are you a Barron Park artist, photographer, artisan, craftsperson, sculptor, designer, musician, composer, writer, poet ... ? Do you know one? You and your work can be featured – with samples or as an interview – in a future BPA Newsletter. Please send us your idea with a draft artist’s statement and reproducible samples or a description of your work to: [mbrbpa@sonic.net](mailto:mbrbpa@sonic.net) or [newsletter@bpapaloalto.org](mailto:newsletter@bpapaloalto.org)

– with samples or as an interview – in a future BPA Newsletter. Please send us your idea with a draft artist’s statement and reproducible samples or a description of your work to: [mbrbpa@sonic.net](mailto:mbrbpa@sonic.net) or [newsletter@bpapaloalto.org](mailto:newsletter@bpapaloalto.org)

# Local Scouts Rewarding for Both Teens and Adults

By Eugene Chow and Andrew Ferguson

Boy Scout Troop 52 of the Pacific Skyline Council (Stanford District), which has been serving the Barron Park and South Palo Alto neighborhoods for the past 60 years, invites all families and volunteers to help teenage kids (sixth through twelfth grade, ages 11 to 18) build character, responsibility, leadership, outdoor skills, and serve their community – all while having FUN!



Preparing a camping meal. Photos courtesy of Scout Troop 52.

Scouts focus on constructive activities and goals such as Citizenship, Fitness, First Aid, Emergency Preparedness, Knot-Tying, Nature, Hiking, Camping, and Cooking. Troop 52 outdoor activities include Camping, Hiking, Scouting for Food (each November in support of Second Harvest Food Bank), Broom Ball (during the winter), the Palo Alto May Fête Parade, along with an annual week-long summer camp.

Senior Scouts are required to perform Service Projects which, over the past 15 years, have included the Gunn High School Stadium flagpole, and, at Arastradero Preserve and elsewhere, benches, tables, picnic tables, an outdoor library, outdoor planting boxes, restoration of sign posts, and fence building. Nicholas Ferguson's Eagle Scout project involved building an outdoor music library for University Lutheran Church. The Eagle Scout is the highest rank in scouting and culmi-



Hiking Mount Umunhum (Mt. Um) in the Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve.

nates years of learning. If you are planning a community service project, please let Troop 52 know.

Troop 52 is sponsored by the Elks Lodge 1471 (4249 El Camino Real) and meets on Monday evenings (7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.) during the school year. Parent participation is encouraged, and Scouts are not required to participate in every activity. The scouting

curriculum is broad and flexible, and adapts well to the pandemic restrictions and special needs. New Scouts are welcome any time of year. Please contact us if you are interested in joining, volunteering, or have any questions. See <https://sites.google.com/view/patroop52/> for more information or reach us directly: Eugene Chow (Parent Leader, [emc73@yahoo.com](mailto:emc73@yahoo.com)) and Andrew Ferguson (Scoutmaster, [fiddleflash@gmail.com](mailto:fiddleflash@gmail.com))

## BPA EMAILS AND WEB LINKS

- **BPA Website:** <http://bpapaloalto.org>
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- **Barron Park Donkeys:** For more info, to volunteer, donate, or to purchase merchandise visit <http://barronparkdonkeys.org> or contact Jenny Kiratli at [barronparkdonkeys@gmail.com](mailto:barronparkdonkeys@gmail.com)
- **Bol Park Native Habitat Project Volunteers:** To volunteer contact Rich Elder at [rich.e.elder@gmail.com](mailto:rich.e.elder@gmail.com)
- **Bol Park Native Habitat Financial Support:** Direct your gift by mail or phone, payable to "Friends of the Palo Alto Parks (FOPAP), for Bol Park Fund," FOPAP, 425 Grant Ave., Suite 27, Palo Alto, CA 94306, (650) 327-7323. Or online to the "Bol Park Fund" at <https://friendsofpaparks.org/donations/>

# Lilian Marcus (1936-2020)

By Lilian's Family



**Lilian Marcus at her 80th birthday party at Hidden Villa. Photo by Thomas Christensen.**

Longtime Barron Park resident, Lilian Marcus, died on May 12, 2020, at age 84.

Born and raised in Denmark, Lilian immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 20 with her husband. They moved to Palo Alto in 1960, where Lilian dedicated herself to family, home, and community, eventually raising four children.

In 1976, newly divorced, Lilian moved to Barron Park with her children. She began working at San Andreas Health Council, where she gained an interest in holistic healthcare, and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree before continuing on to graduate studies in professional psychology. After passing the MFCC (Marriage, Family and Child Counseling) license, she began work as a professional psychologist with the State of California. An early adopter of innovations, she focused her private therapy practice on biofeedback and later on the cutting-edge field of neurofeedback. In 2001, she completed her PhD in Psychology.

Lilian maintained a life-long commitment to advancing mental health and helping others, continuing her private practice into her early

80s, while also supporting the National Alliance on Mental Illness as a presenter and advocate. She had deep understanding and empathy for how an individual's illness impacts family members. Said one colleague, "I considered her the best therapist anywhere, and she generously helped so many people have better lives."

No stranger to adversity, Lilian lost her mother to mental illness and spent two years as a hidden child during the German Occupation of Denmark in World War II. Yet she maintained an optimistic outlook, living life joyfully and fully, especially in the final decades of her life. Her joys included family visits, helping others through

her work, sharing eggs from her small flock of chickens, long walks with friends and alone, a variety of neighborhood activities, gardening, music and theater, various social dance groups, her book club, her Mahjong group, and hiking. Her kindness and zest for life brought out the goodness in people. She was loved by many.

Lilian was predeceased by partner Peter, former husband John, daughter Lise, and three siblings. She is survived by her children Barbara, Finn, and Marianna, their spouses, and six grandchildren.

A memorial service in Palo Alto is anticipated for 2021 or 2022.

## EMAIL LISTS

The Barron Park Association manages three email lists: *bpa-news*, *bpa-misc*, and *bpa-issues*. The email lists are hosted on Google Groups. To join a list, go to <http://bpapaloalto.org/bpa-email-lists/>. The link provides information about each list and an easy way to subscribe to one or more of them.

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**BPA Board Meetings** are held the 3rd Tuesday of most months at 7:15 p.m. Neighbors are welcome.

**BPA Community Happy Hours** are held the 3rd Tuesday of every month at 6:00 p.m.

For Meeting and Happy Hour schedules write to: [president@bpapaloalto.org](mailto:president@bpapaloalto.org)

[www.bpapaloalto.org](http://www.bpapaloalto.org)

# Our Year in Short Stories

An Interview with Yvonne Boxerman

**A** Barron Park neighbor for more than 30 years, short story writer Yvonne Boxerman was born in Ireland and has lived in France, Israel, Canada, and the East and West Coasts. She taught high school English in San Francisco before moving on to librarianship and human resources. Her book of stories, *Unexpected Encounters*, was published this summer.

EDS: *Was Barron Park a good setting for writing short stories, some about a topic still very much with us?*

YB: Sometimes I would just sit outside during the lovely spring days and think and write. Even with shelter in place, I always managed to take my walk around the neighborhood. I especially loved to sit on a bench in Bol Park and just let my imagination wander, or talk to my husband about an idea if he happened to come on that walk. We had no end of time in those early days of the pandemic, as all of our usual activities and connections were canceled or put on hold!

EDS: *We're guessing the interactions you deal with are important to you. Can you explain a little?*

YB: I'm a total news junky, and so I watched Andrew Cuomo telling us how utterly devastating it was in New York. I started to create ordinary people trying to live their lives with enormous obstacles. So, for example, the first story in the Covid series is called "Divorce in the Time of Covid-19." A reporter was wondering how difficult it had to be for couples who were contemplating or were even in the middle of a divorce while sheltering in place – children to care for and jobs managed from home with no help from any quarter – all this while they might not even be speaking to each other.

Later, I created an apartment building in Brooklyn and some of its residents. I've been asked, "Why Brooklyn?" I've only been to NYC a few times, but it seemed that Brooklyn was being affected so terribly by the pandemic in those early days. Remember when we saw the freezer trucks they were using as a morgue? Those images were so terrible I knew I had to put individual stories in the heart of that world.

A character who is present to some degree in



Yvonne Boxerman. Photo by David Boxerman.

each Brooklyn story is Darrell Robinson, the Super of the building. We meet him and his family in the first episode, and the last story ends over Memorial Day following the death of George Floyd. Darrell has to decide whether he's going to join a protest march during the pandemic. The dire consequences of his decision are at the crux of the final story.

The news inspired other stories: people losing jobs, nurses without enough PPE, three young buddies who move to NYC in late 2019 from a small meat-packing town in Iowa only to lose jobs and savings, as they worry about their families back home. May I say that most of my stories are upbeat despite the sad circumstances? I hope they celebrate the indomitable human spirit. One resident of the building owns a bridal shop, of course now shuttered. One day as she's about to check the store, she finds a teenage girl sleeping in the doorway. While the girl's circumstances are not good, I try to bring a little hope to everyone's life. My goal was to show the good that continues to emerge even during devastation, and how lives are changed by these encounters.

My personal stories are not related to the pandemic. For example, "An Immigrant's Tale" tells of my family's almost disastrous Atlantic crossing from Ireland to Canada when I was 11. Our ship literally just about sank in an October storm. Another incident

happened years ago near Ernie's Liquor when I saw a toddler about to step in front of my car as I was driving along El Camino. It tells of that beautiful, lost toddler, an immigrant family, and a truly other-worldly person.

I wrote the story called "Marcos" when I was hospitalized at Stanford for a few days. Marcos is a scrappy teenager whose father is dying because they can't find a donor heart. He meets a wealthy lawyer brought in for a mild heart attack. In their first exchange Marcos says, "Bet they could find a heart if he was a rich white guy," looking directly at Benjamin, the lawyer. They build an unusual relationship while Benjamin recuperates, as Marcos is facing the loss of his dad.

EDS: *What brought some of these encounters to mind?*

YB: In almost every story I wanted the encounter to change the life of the protagonists in some way. For example, in "Phoebe's Metamorphosis" – about a fiercely independent woman (à la Edith Wharton), living in NYC in 1904, but financially under the thumb of her husband – I wanted to show how her life and that of a couple she meets are changed forever by a choice she can control. "The Highwayman" is a humorous story that grew out of a particularly funny Mel Brooks movie my husband and I saw. We both decided it would definitely be Mel Brooks's next movie; alas, it never happened. "Harry" is an obnoxious, unethical businessman, a bigot really, in 1960s' Texas. One day a real Angel comes to his doorstep as his "Account Manager." Harry must confront his own shady practices. The fact that the Angel is Black makes it especially troublesome for him to face his Hereafter.

EDS: *What do you think your readers will take away?*

YB: I hope they will think about how the pandemic and the economic downturn has affected so many people around this country in ways we, living comfortably and in relative safety, may not be able to fully grasp. It is a cliché, but there are so many more good people doing good things for others than the opposite. Today's Black Lives Matter movement was just getting going when I wrote the last story in late May. I wanted to write about

a Black man near my age struggling with whether to join a protest and who couldn't put injustice aside.

EDS: *Have you had reactions from people who've read the stories?*

YB: Yes, there are some very nice comments on Amazon and not only from my friends! I've given Zoom talks, and the feedback has been positive. I sent each story to my book groups. People wrote back asking me to keep them coming. Some said they cried after they

read a particular story. My friends' encouragement really kept me writing through April and May.

EDS: *Do you have reading recommendations for us, your neighbors?*

YB: With the activity around my book, plus the library limitations, I haven't had a lot of time to read. But I did read these for my book groups and can recommend them all: *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett; *The Sister of My Heart* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni; *The*

*Last Runaway* by Tracy Chevalier; *The Giver of Stars* by Jojo Moyes; and *The Only Story* by Julian Barnes.

EDS: *How can we obtain a copy of Unexpected Encounters?*

YB: You can get a signed copy from me for \$15 (using Zelle, check, or cash). Send email to me at [yboxerman@gmail.com](mailto:yboxerman@gmail.com) so we can do a contactless pickup. It's also on [Amazon](#) for \$18.



## 2020-2021 Barron Park Association Membership

Thanks to all the supporting members of the Barron Park Association! It's time to join or renew for April 2020-March 2021. (If you joined or renewed after December 1, 2019, your membership is still current.) To check your membership status, email: [barronpark.paloalto@gmail.com](mailto:barronpark.paloalto@gmail.com)

Your annual dues support BPA-sponsored and Committee activities, including our quarterly Newsletters, monthly Happy Hours, neighborhood project support – and soon, hopefully – May Fête, Movie Night, and other social events.

Join online at: <http://bpapaloalto.org/membership-form> using PayPal, or mail this completed form with your check to:

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Note: Membership and contributions are not tax deductible.

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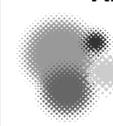
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