

# THE INCEPTION OF MY GRAND APPRECIATION FOR ALL THINGS NATURAL

By Rose White

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED FLOWERS, POSSIBLY BECAUSE OF MY NAME....BUT ALSO because of the many hours as a child that I spent exploring my grandmother's lush and varied gardens---expanses that covered both her entire front and back yards.

More than 2 decades ago ----and while I was still a classroom teacher, the Los Angeles Audubon chapter in Culver City gifted me with a week's birding experience in Greenwich, Connecticut----all expenses paid. I had taken my Inner City kindergarten class to their fieldtrip site in a lagoon near the Ballona Wetlands in Playa del Rey, prepped them well replete with the knowledge of how to use a microscope to investigate the multitude of organisms that inhabit such waters. In fact, when they found out that my students were so young they negated the use of microscopes on that trip to the point that both the students and I protested in disappointment. That was an eye-opening and wonderous experience for all involved and the next thing I knew one of the directors of student engagement had me on the phone interviewing me for that marvelous, summer experience back East.

While in Connecticut, I had an opportunity to walk old growth forests, examine rock walls, go birding both in the daylight and at night, explore the shores for horseshoe crabs, dine in an ancient barn that had been reconstructed on the site from which I learned some spectacular new recipes, take classes in ecology/conservation/recycling-reuse/activism and much much more. I still have two t-shirts that I purchased on that trip, made by the camp counselors---one that was hand-illustrated with acrylic bird droppings that I wear every Halloween and another that shows an array of mushrooms that we came across in the forests during that week. I can count on one hand the number of compliments I get about that mushroom t-shirt every time I wear it.

Undoubtedly, my teaching of science and all things natural that following year was enhanced immensely as I turned my school site environment into a mini-Audubon site. We went birding for Plovers, Killdeer, pigeons and gulls; one even built a nest in the middle of the faculty parking lot and had to be protected by the school's custodian. We adopted several trees on the grounds and chronicled the changes they went through over the months in close observation/discussion and art. We collected seed pods that fell from the trees and used them as templates for reverse tie-dying swatches of cloth (THAT was the craze way back then) that we quilted and turned into TV Watching Pillows for Father's Day gifts.

My own regard for nature went through a paradigm shift that fateful summer as well and has been evolving ever since. I have an incredible regard for the natural surroundings of my own, personal urban landscape. I "built" a few "rock walls" on my property after I had some retaining walls refurbished and elected not to throw the pieces of the old structures in the trash. Of course, you can barely see them now as they have been overgrown with ivy. I rejected the notion to install solar panels on my roof because the companies that gave me bids said that I would have to cut-down or severely cut-back the two 70 year old Italian Stone Pines and the Canary Island Pine that flank my house and cover my roof. Ironically, those 3 trees have kept my house on the "cool side" the 40 years that I have lived here and preserved the roof that I only recently had rebuilt.

I don't consider myself a formally-trained nor self-taught birder...just a curious observer that consults the multitude of books on birds I bought when I was an unretired teacher. I have spotted on my property owls, hawks, woodpeckers, hummingbirds, mourning doves, blue jays, and some tiny noisy birds that look like gray "radishes" with beaks. I even saw a brilliantly colorful orangy-yellow bird the other day flitting around a neighbor's property; can't decide if it's a type of Oriole or a Tanager. I've potted milkweed throughout my garage-top succulent garden to attract migrating Monarchs ( the kind I saw once when I visited Michoacan, Mexico), as well as other entertaining pollinators.

During the 2020 Covid pandemic I had the privilege of "caretaking" several families of Black Phoebes that decided to use my backyard as a test flight path for their various off-spring. What a delightful distraction that was at such an anxiety-producing period in our nation's history. I kept a diary from May 'til September of those exploits, even took a photo or two that I would love to share with you, as well.

So, these are my recollections in response to your all-call for member contributions.

Sincerely,  
Rose White

