



Looking has been
my greatest joy
all my life.

— David Hockney,
1937-2026

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NEWS OF A KINDER WORLD

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INSIDE, PAGE 2

Disabled animals find a forever home at
The Julian Sunny Side Up Animal Sanctuary.

Good stories deserve company.
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COMING IN SEPTEMBER

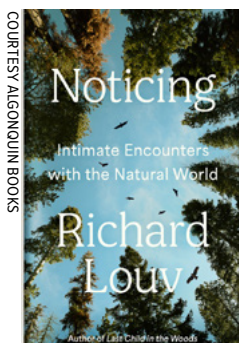
A state park in Imperial Beach employs
new technology to increase accessibility.

PERHAPS KINDNESS BEGINS WITH Noticing

In New Book, Author Richard Louv Explores Curiosity and Greater Awareness



PHOTO BY RICHARD LOUV FROM "NOTICING"



COURTESY ALGONQUIN BOOKS

**A Conversation
with Richard Louv,
Page 10**

Long before he coined the phrase “nature-deficit disorder” in his 2005 book, “Last Child in the Woods,” San Diegan Richard Louv was encouraging us to pay closer attention to the world around us.

His new book, “Noticing: Intimate Encounters with the Natural World,” is an invitation to slow down, look more carefully and rediscover the wonder waiting just beyond our routines.

As I read Louv’s book, I couldn’t help wondering if perhaps kindness begins with noticing.

Before we can offer help, extend compassion or feel connected to one another, we first have to pay attention.

We notice the coworker who seems unusually quiet.

We spot the neighbor struggling with an oversized trash can. We smile at the child eager to show us a drawing. And, we are in awe of the hawk soaring overhead or an unlikely encounter with a fox crossing a trail.

Attention is the first step toward connection, and connection is where kindness grows.

In the accompanying adaptation from “Noticing” and in conversation with us, Louv reflects on what happens when we learn to notice more deeply — not only to the natural world, but to one another. His is a heartfelt reminder that a more compassionate life may begin with something as simple as paying attention.

— Leigh Fenly, Editor

THE BEGINNING OF WONDER

*Adapted from the introduction to the new book
“Noticing: Intimate Encounters with the Natural
World” by Richard Louv*

Noticing is the beginning of wonder. Wonder, as the memoirist Valarie Kaur defines it, is the act of looking at something in nature, including people, and thinking, “You are a part of me I do not yet know.”

Deep noticing represents an accumulation of old, new and still-developing skills — sensory, scientific, artistic and spiritual. It is also about

confronting despair and finding hope in a time when all our sanity seems to be wearing thin.

Not long after my wife, Kathy, and I moved to the mountains in Julian, I joined a team to monitor wildlife trail cameras. These trail cams, as they’re usually called, are stationary, battery-powered infrared cameras housed in metal cases and usually mounted on trees. Their shutters are triggered by movement, and they can capture still photos or videos,



PHOTO BY HEATHER KUHNEN

Deep noticing is about finding hope, explains author Richard Louv in his new book.

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Your TurnYour Voice. Your Story.
Our Community.**WHY I STARTED A NONPROFIT**

How Two One-Eyed Horses Changed My Life

By Renee Pitera

When COVID-19 shut everything down, I suddenly found myself without the hair stylist career I had loved for 38 years.

I have worked since I was 14 years old. During the pandemic, salons kept opening and closing, and, for the first time in my life, I wasn't working. I missed my clients, worried about finances and felt uncomfortable having so much unstructured time. I needed something constructive to do.

My daughter, Adrienne, who is now 22, and I began caring for horses at a nearby stable. When the owners decided to downsize, they offered us one of the horses we had grown especially attached to — a miniature horse named Black Jack.

Jack has only one eye.

When we talked to veterinarians, we learned that smaller horses, especially those who can't see half of what's going on, prefer to be in smaller spaces. So our half-acre property in Julian is perfect for him.

But horses aren't meant to be alone, and Jack needed a friend.

We started calling rescue organizations looking for another miniature horse. Eventually, we got a call about another one-eyed gelding called Sparrow.

Sparrow had survived unimaginable hardship. He was injured and perhaps lost his eye after an incident at an animal auction. He ended up in Southern California, where he underwent surgery. He had barely been handled by people and was terrified of almost everything.

Adrienne and I went to meet him, and then we brought him home.

Now Jack and Sparrow are wonderful

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Animal Sanctuary**[Website](#)[Email](#)

friends. They are brothers. They have lots of room to move around on our property, and they have a beautiful life.

A SANCTUARY BEGINS

Jack and Sparrow were the beginning.

Today we have 24 animals at The Julian Sunny Side Up Animal Sanctuary, our nonprofit. Our work is supported by private donations and community grants.

Once people realized I had a soft spot for disabled animals, word spread. Someone called about a one-eyed dog. Then came Stella, a partially paralyzed dog. She went from being chained to a wall to having a Christmas stocking and sleeping with the family.

Three senior dogs found a home with us.

A barn cat showed up. Chickens needed a place to go. Two rabbits joined the family.

Recently we adopted Tony Hawk, another partially paralyzed dog, who is super wonderful. We adopted him from the [Frosted Faces Foundation](#) in Ramona. They provide lifetime veterinarian care for their dogs once they are adopted. That helps us provide the best quality of life for Tony.

Our sanctuary's name reminds me how things change. COVID-19 was so depressing, but once the animals showed up, everything turned happy and bright. Looking out toward Volcan Mountain each morning, we see brave, happy days.

STELLA MEETS THE KIDS

One of the most meaningful experiences came when we were invited to bring Stella, who gets around with wheels for back legs, to a first-grade classroom at an elementary school.

The first time we visited, the children asked, "What's wrong with that dog?" A few visits later, they weren't asking that anymore. Instead they asked, "Can we

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YOUR TURN

We Want to Hear Your Story

In this column, founders of nonprofits tell their stories of taking leaps of faith and building something that didn't exist before. If you have followed the path to creating a nonprofit, we would love to hear your story. Write to us at info@kindnesshappenshere.org

Your Voice. Your Story.
Our Community.

Your Turn

A soft spot for disabled animals led Renee Pitera, left, and her daughter, Adrienne, to create the nonprofit Julian Sunny Side Up Animal Sanctuary. One of the first animals to find a home there was Black Jack, a one-eyed miniature gelding. A more recent addition is Tony Hawk, a partially paralyzed rescue dog.



COURTESY RENEE PITERA

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run with Stella?”

We don't believe there's anything wrong with Stella. She simply moves through the world differently.

Our presence at the school encouraged a shift among the kids. They came to understand that we are perfect the way we are, no more, no less than anyone else. That change is beautiful to witness — going from what's wrong to what's right.

Since then, we've taken our dogs to community events, wellness walks and wheelchair regattas.

What strikes me is the amount of love

that is exchanged. Our dogs offer people something beautiful, which is acceptance. Bountiful love is exchanged. Joy arises effortlessly. You do not need to push it.

JOBS FOR TWO

Today I'm semi-retired, working part time as a hairstylist from my home. The animals need someone here all the time. We don't get out much, which I love.

I couldn't do any of it without Adrienne, who serves as our operations director. She has extensive experience with horses, is young and strong, and works beside me every day — even when it's 25 degrees outside or raining

sideways.

Sometimes I'll tell her to go inside, get a cup of hot chocolate and warm up, but she'll tell me I'm the one who should go inside. She never leaves me.

Adrienne and I are content to work within the confines of our limitations. We don't need to grow any bigger. We feel that if we care for our animals, keep them safe and make them feel loved, it's mission accomplished.

I believe kindness begins with the way we treat those who are most vulnerable, whether they walk on two legs or four. When we make room for those who are different, we create a gentler world for all of us.

Your Turn

Your Voice. Your Story.
Our Community.

THE GIFT OF VOLUNTEERING

What It Means to Help Someone See Clearly

By Dr. Robert H. Meisel

My volunteer career started more than 40 years ago, when I began helping patients of all ages at the Lions Optometric Vision Clinic in Balboa Park as a new member of the San Diego County Optometric Society.

I had recently completed my active-duty military service and finally had time to help those in need.

That would soon change. Between my Naval Reserve commitment and a busy professional life that included purchasing a private optometric practice and eventually adding a second office, there was little time left for volunteering. My volunteer work became limited until shortly before I retired.

At that point, I became involved with international vision clinics conducted by Lions In Sight (LIS). I have evaluated the eyesight of thousands of people on more than 20 missions in multiple countries. Every clinic is different, but they all share the same goal: helping people receive free eyeglasses.

I was so impressed by the selflessness of the entire LIS optometric community and by the invaluable technicians. Many of them became lifelong friends through our shared mission of helping others around the globe.

FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

We often take glasses for granted in the United States. In many parts of the world, however, access to an eye exam is limited, and a simple pair of glasses can be life changing. Studies have shown that people who receive corrective eyewear are often able to improve their employment opportunities and quality of life, creating a better future for themselves and their families.

One experience from my time doing contract work at a state prison remains etched in my memory and continues to influence my commitment to serving young people. One prisoner who had little hope of parole was having difficulty reading. My examination revealed that he had lived with a high degree of farsightedness since childhood. As we talked, he began to cry when he realized why reading had always been such a struggle.

He had always passed the standard vision screening because it measured his ability to read letters 20 feet away. But no one had tested how well he could focus on words just 16 inches from his face, where he struggled tremendously. I couldn't help wondering how his life might have turned out if someone had identified the problem early and prescribed the glasses he needed for reading and schoolwork.

Unfortunately, we'll never know the answer to that "what if."

Experiences like that have reinforced my belief that basic vision screenings can miss important problems. Seeing 20/20 at a distance is only part of the equation. Many students pass basic screenings while still struggling with the close-up vision they need every day in the classroom.



COURTESY ROBERT MEISEL

Earlier this year, Dr. Robert Meisel participated in an international Lions In Sight vision clinic in Bangalore, India.

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Lions In Sight

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HELPING UNHOUSED STUDENTS

I continue to make international trips. Earlier this year, I volunteered in India, and I will lead next year's vision clinic in the Philippines. I volunteer monthly at clinics for patients of all ages at the Lions Optometric Vision Clinic. In addition, I volunteer with the Monarch School for unhoused students in grades K-12 in Barrio Logan.

After nearly 20 years coordinating screenings and eye exams for Monarch students with fellow San Diego Optometric Society

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Your Turn



COURTESY ROBERT MEISEL

"I have seen firsthand what the right (eyeglass) prescription can do," explains Dr. Meisel, shown here conducting an eye exam at a Title I school in San Diego's South Bay.

YOUR TURN

We Want to Hear Your Story

We invite you, our readers, to share personal stories of volunteering. Tell us in about 500 words how you benefitted and what you learned. Include a photo and background information on the organization that provided your volunteer experience.

We will pick one of your stories for this space each month.

We're looking forward to hearing from you. Send your story to info@kindnesshappenshere.org

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volunteers, I have seen firsthand what the right prescription can do. When students can finally see clearly, they become more engaged in the classroom, more confident and better able to learn.

The joy of watching someone experience the world through a new pair of glasses never gets old. Even after decades of practicing optometry, I continue to find it inspiring every time.

Recently, the Lions Optometric Vision Clinic has partnered with the San Diego County Optometric Society to provide screenings and eye exams for students at Title I schools in several local school districts, bringing vision services that were previously unavailable to many children.

After more than 50 years of practicing optometry, I feel incredibly blessed to have had the opportunity to serve underserved communities both in San Diego County and around the world. I still have a strong desire to continue that work, and I hope the privilege of helping others has made me a better person.

Dr. Meisel is public awareness chair for the San Diego County Optometric Society.



COURTESY ROBERT MEISEL

In 2018, Dr. Meisel diagnosed extreme farsightedness in young twins in Durres, Albania.

Your TurnYour Voice. Your Story.
Our Community.**KINDNESS, ACCORDING TO YOU**

The Teachers We Never Forget

Kindness Happens Here is at its best when it becomes a shared exchange.

Each month, we ask our readers to slow down, look back and tell us about moments of compassion, generosity or insight that have made a lasting mark. Your responses remind us that kindness does not end with one act — it continues when it is shared.

AUGUST'S QUESTION

Who have been your greatest teachers?

LOVE PROTECTS AND ACCEPTS

When I think of my greatest teachers, I don't picture classrooms or textbooks. I think of the people who taught me what love looks like simply by the way they lived.

My grandma Stella taught me that love protects. She always insisted on holding my hand, even when I resisted. One day, I tripped on a crack in the sidewalk, but because she was holding on, I didn't fall. It became one of the simplest and most profound lessons of my life: The people who love us often see the cracks before we do.

Today: Stella still holds my hand from heaven.

Years later, Paul and Betty changed the course of my life. Because their son loved me, they welcomed me into their home without hesitation. They showed me a kindness and acceptance I had never known. For the first time, I felt safe.

Their home was filled with ordinary moments that now feel extraordinary: Betty singing in the kitchen every morning, cooking with her, laughing over good food, fabulous wine and Sunday morning jam sessions.

These times taught me that it is never too late to change your story. Paul and Betty quietly encouraged me as I built a different life, never asking for recognition or expecting anything in return. Their belief in me became a foundation I could stand on.

Today: Their lessons live on in the traditions I now share with my own family.

Then there's Danielle — my wisest owl, my voice of reason and the big sister I always wanted. She knows me better than almost anyone. She sees through the chaos and gently guides me back to myself. She somehow always knows exactly what I need to hear. Her wisdom has been my compass through some of life's biggest storms.

Today: Danielle is still my dearest friend, guiding me with her thoughtful wisdom, love of history and unmistakable Capricorn practicality.

And then there's my greatest teacher still in progress — my daughter, Berklee.

Motherhood has turned my world completely upside down — in all the best ways. Every day Berklee teaches me patience,



COURTESY AMANDA SCHMIDT

Amanda Schmidt, right, and her daughter, Berklee, trade teaching moments, one learning from the other and back again.

trust, joy, kindness, resilience and how to love with my whole heart. She reminds me that our relationship isn't just about me teaching her; it's about allowing her to teach me, too.

Today: Berklee and middle school are waiting around the corner, and I have no doubt our next chapter will come with a whole new set of lessons.

Looking back, I realize the people who shaped me were never trying to teach at all. They were simply loving me the best way they knew how. That's the beautiful thing about love — it leaves fingerprints on the people it touches.

Those fingerprints become the way we hold our own children, welcome others into our homes, offer grace to a friend or reach for someone's hand before they stumble.

If we are lucky, the greatest lessons we leave behind won't be the words we spoke, but the love we shared.

— **Amanda Schmidt, Ocean Beach**

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Your Voice. Your Story.
Our Community.

Your Turn

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MEMORABLE LESSONS FROM MENTORS

Raised in a family of 10 kids, I am deeply grateful to my parents for instilling in me a strong work ethic, intellectual curiosity and a commitment to continuous learning.

My father fostered my analytical skills through hands-on technical projects. For instance, he taught me how to keep a baseball box score at age 4 and fostered my love for photography. My first camera was a Kodak Brownie. Years later, he taught me how to gap my own spark plugs in my old Rambler flat-head, six-cylinder engine.

My mother modeled the importance of a global perspective, resilience and compassionate engagement with others. To her, no one was a stranger.

Throughout my life, I have been fortunate to learn from exceptional teachers. In high school, Max Manteuffel brought history to life by making the subject deeply personal.

In college, my developmental psychology professor, Sandor Brent, brilliantly translated complex concepts into accessible lessons, while inspiring me to explore the world. Prior to earning his Ph.D., he had sailed the world as a merchant mariner and studied Zen Buddhism in Japan.

Both men became lifelong friends, with Sandor later providing invaluable support to my family during a medical crisis. He dedicated much of his retirement to protecting and resettling refugees from around the world.

Although these mentors have passed away, their profound lessons remain a guiding force in my life.

— *Lin Jakary, Point Loma*

A 70-YEAR FRIENDSHIP

We met when we were 2. We are now in our 70s. He was and is both teacher and student, and we have loved each other dearly, for these many years.

One reason we shaped each other so meaningfully is that we are polar opposites: I am an introvert; he is an extrovert. I am a seeker of safety; he is an adventurer.

My family was a thinking family; his, a feeling family. We were restrained; they were wild. My family was ostensibly humorless, while his family was raucous and funny.

I was immediately drawn to him and he to me. We learned that we could incorporate each other's styles — and be the better for having done so.

One piece of practical advice he gave me, when we were 4, was to never take my clothes off in front of my future wife because that's all she really wants. I was mystified, and still am, as to why my wife would want to see me naked, so have adhered to his advice strictly to this very day.

— *Lee Goldenberg, Point Loma*

SEPTEMBER'S QUESTION

Has an act of noticing led to an act of kindness in your life? Tell us about it.

Please email your answer to info@kindnesshappenshere.org by Aug. 10. We'll pick a sampling of responses to feature here. Together, your words create a shared space where kindness is noticed, valued and passed along.

“

I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands. You need to be able to throw something back.

— Maya Angelou

Join the Good Work

LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES TO GIVE THROUGH VOLUNTEERING

Set Sail for Inclusion

Help veterans and other adults with disabilities experience the joy of sailing on San Diego Bay with Challenged Sailors San Diego. Volunteers are needed as companion sailors, dock assistants and boat maintenance helpers. No sailing experience is required for many roles. Training is provided.

• **Contact:** [Challenged Sailors San Diego](#)

Welcome Visitors to Balboa Park

Become a park ambassador with Forever Balboa Park and help visitors discover one of San Diego's most treasured places. Volunteers greet guests, answer questions and provide information while serving as the park's friendly front line. Training is provided. Volunteers commit to two 4-hour shifts each month.

• **Contact:** [Forever Balboa Park](#)

Celebrate Local History

Lend a hand at the Rancho Dominguez Adobe Museum's 200th Bicentennial Celebration on Sept. 19. Volunteers are needed to help with children's activities and event setup and cleanup during this special day of exhibits, tours, entertainment and family fun. The museum is located near Compton.

• **Contact:** [Dominguez Rancho](#)

Care for a Healing Garden

Help care for the Trees for Health Garden in Balboa Park, a collection of medicinal plants maintained by dedicated volunteers. Garden stewards meet Friday mornings to plant, weed and maintain this peaceful community space. A commitment of two Fridays each month for at least a year is requested.

• **Contact:** [Trees for Health Garden](#)

Does your organization provide volunteer opportunities you would like to see featured here? Write us at info@kindnesshappenshere.org

Listening In

Sharing Ideas That Inspire

CITIZEN SCIENCE

Watching Belugas, Advancing Science

By Leigh Fenly
Staff Writer

Beluga whales live primarily in areas of Arctic sea ice, but every summer about 60,000 migrate south to Canada to summer in the shallow waters of the Churchill River estuary. There they raise their calves, molt their skin and socialize.

With their enchanting “smiles” and pearly white skin, belugas are among the most recognizable of all whales. Extremely sociable mammals, belugas live, hunt and migrate in pods ranging from a few individuals to hundreds. They are characterized by a bulbous forehead, called a melon, which allows them to chirp, whistle and squeal — distinctive calls used to navigate, communicate with other belugas and locate food.

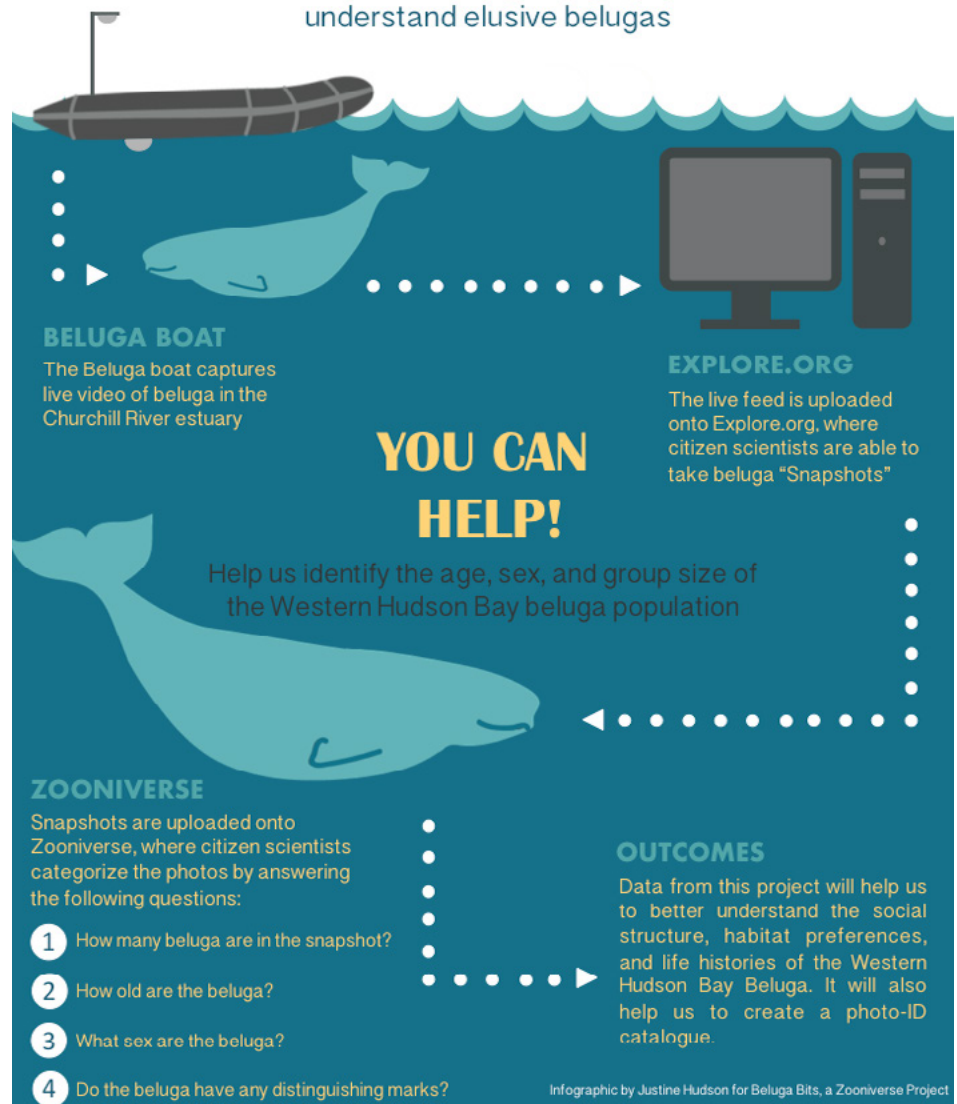
Like other whales, belugas are difficult to study, and many questions about their social structure and behavior remain unanswered. But a decade ago, researchers found an innovative way to obtain voluminous amounts of new data about the whales.

The Beluga Bits project, conducted in Manitoba's Churchill River every summer, combines a boat, an underwater camera, machine learning, livestreamed video and 42,000 online volunteers.

Every July and August, Polar Bears International operates a boat on a daily course up and down the river and into Hudson Bay. Whales often approach the Beluga Boat, which is equipped with an underwater 360-degree Beluga Cam that captures videos of belugas around, behind and beneath the boat. These videos

BELUGA BITS

The use of non-invasive photography to better understand elusive belugas



GRAPHIC / ASSINIBOINE PARK ZOO

are livestreamed to the public through [Explore.org](https://explore.org).

The videos are converted into 96,000 images annually and uploaded onto the citizen science platform Zooniverse. Via a short tutorial, volunteers learn to classify the beluga images by sex, age and group size. Scientists have used this data to further their understanding of belugas and other marine species. In addition to recording basic information, volunteers have been asked to help identify individual belugas returning to the estuary year after year and to spot interesting beluga behaviors.

Since 2016, volunteer citizen scientists have made more than 10 million classifications, making Beluga Bits one of the most productive programs on Zooniverse.

EXPOSING THEIR BITS

The idea for the project began with Stephen Petersen, director of conservation and research at Assiniboine Park Zoo in Winnipeg. On a trip to Churchill to study beluga behavior, he was introduced by colleagues from Polar Bears International to the livestream Beluga Cam.

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MADISON STEVENS / POLAR BEARS INTERNATIONAL

Citizen scientists peruse underwater images like these, taken in warm estuary waters in Canada, to further beluga whale research.

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He quickly saw the potential of the camera as a new scientific tool that could aid in the difficult task of identifying individual belugas. As a bonus, the camera promised easy sex identification because it captured belugas swimming upside down, exposing their “bits.” Hence the playful name, Beluga Bits.

Subsequently, Petersen formed a partnership with the zoo, Polar Bears International, Zooniverse and Explore.org that operates Beluga Bits today.

As the project grew, so did the mountain of images. By 2021, volunteers were spending a lot of time sorting through photographs containing nothing but water. Researchers partnered with computer scientists at the University of Manitoba to develop an algorithm that removes empty frames before volunteers ever see them. Rather than replacing citizen scientists, AI simply handles the nonessential

work, leaving people to do what they do best — notice details.

One of the biggest surprises came from the volunteers themselves. While classifying beluga images, participants repeatedly noticed unfamiliar jellyfish drifting through the photographs. Their observations led researchers to create a new project devoted entirely to jellyfish, ultimately documenting species never before recorded that far south in Hudson Bay.

Volunteers have also helped to identify returning whales, some of which have been spotted over multiple years. These resightings are important because they help researchers paint a picture of how belugas use the estuary over time and, in the future, could help them track calving rates, family relationships and habitat use.

Most people will never travel to Hudson Bay or hear a beluga whistle or chirp. However, through Beluga Bits, anyone

with an internet connection can help protect a species without ever encountering it in person. The program is a reminder that science, like kindness, often advances through small acts repeated thousands of times by thousands of individuals.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

Visit [Beluga Bits](#) story map.

Volunteer tasks change as new research questions emerge. New projects are added all the time.

Polar Bears International and Explore.org livestream video from the underwater [Beluga Cam](#).

Viewers can watch belugas raising their calves, listen to them through an underwater hydrophone and occasionally spot seabirds, boats or even a passing polar bear.

Cover Story: The Beginning of Wonder

A Conversation with Author Richard Louv

Question: Many acts of kindness begin with a simple moment of attention — someone noticing a person in need, for example. Do you think noticing itself can be an act of kindness?

Answer: No one protects anyone or any place that they do not love, and no one loves anything without first noticing it at a deep level. I've come to believe that there are two habitats. One is the physical natural habitat. Many of us value, protect and teach our children about that habitat. The second habitat is the habitat of the heart.

When you encounter a fox and it looks into your eyes, you enter the habitat of the heart. That moment connects you to far more than the fox. We do little to value and protect and teach our children about that habitat. But if one of those two habitats goes, so does the other.

Q: Modern life rewards speed and efficiency. What do you think we lose when we are moving too fast to notice the world around us?

A: In today's world, too few children and adults notice the mysteries beyond the screen. In my 2005 book, "Last Child in the Woods," I introduced the term "nature-deficit disorder" — not as a formal medical diagnosis but a doorway to a larger conversation. While researching that book, I was able to identify only 60 studies related to the growing gap between children and nature or the benefits of nature experiences.

Since then, studying the impact of nature in people's lives has become a growth industry. The Children & Nature Network (C&NN) — a nonprofit that grew out of "Last Child" — has compiled an extensive and free online research library providing abstracts for over 1,500 peer-reviewed studies that link time spent in the natural world to cognitive, physical and emotional health.

Experiences in the natural world are associated with reduction of symptoms of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder; depression and anxiety; prevention or reduction of obesity and myopia; and strengthening of the immune system. Other positive outcomes include stronger social bonds, reduction in neighborhood violence, greater creativity and higher test scores.

Most of all, the natural world nurtures our spirit.

Q: Some people seem naturally observant, while others rush through life. Is noticing a skill we can cultivate? If so, where would you suggest we begin?

A: In part to deal with my own nature deficit, I've been asking folks that question. In "Noticing," you'll meet a nature therapist who helps people discover their hidden selves in a mountain forest; a man who for years has driven 60 miles weekly to plant pine seedlings on Volcan Mountain; and a young indigenous video artist whose work draws from these mountains and her ancestors.

You will also become acquainted with my neighbor, a Tibetan

Buddhist lama, who teaches me about the concept of interbeing, and meet a woman who survived violent abuse, became a para-trooper and hopes to remake her life by helping other women remake theirs in the natural world.

You will read about a tribal council member protecting ceremonial land and about a neighbor who, while fighting in the swamps of Vietnam, picked up a wounded egret and carried it into the future. Now he sits on his deck most evenings waiting for a local egret to fly across the valley below. On many nights, it does.

Beyond this region, I've interviewed artists, photographers, teachers, botanists and other biologists, writers, artists, ranchers, conservationists, religious leaders, an expert on "the loneliness of trees" and many others.

From them, I've learned about the often-unconscious acts of what I now call deep noticing. That's not an original concept. It's ancient. I believe that, beginning with students in the earliest grades, deep noticing should be taught and explored.

Q: We often think of noticing as a solitary act, but can paying attention actually strengthen communities? If so, how?

A: There's an enormous, pent-up hunger for deep noticing in nature. Several trends are converging, and they all have to do with community. One trend is the loneliness epidemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I received emails and letters from parents who reported seeing wild animals in their yards for the first time. That's due to far more wildlife being in cities than most of us suspect. In the wild, many of these animals are diurnal— thus, active during the day. But as human population patterns moved wildlife into cities, these animals became nocturnal for self-protection.

As the pandemic moved people indoors, out came the critters. We noticed and did not feel so alone.

Another trend is the growth of research into animal and plant communication. This includes learning about the networks of mycelium, the branching, thread-like filaments of fungus, that carry messages from trees to other trees, sometimes connecting whole forests. Researchers are also learning about the acoustic communication of forest elephants, which humans cannot hear, and the shared games of bumblebees.

We are surrounded by a Great Conversation that shouts and murmurs all around us.

In the age of artificial intelligence and hidden algorithms, authenticity is in short supply. We hunger for the real: the look in that fox's eyes as it turns toward us, the sound of singing trees, the touch of a mountain lion track as we kneel to trace it. These moments may be as close as we can get to the mystery that moves us — the larger kindness, the life force to which we belong.



PHOTO BY JOHN JOHNS

Cover Story: The Beginning of Wonder

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day or night.

My trail-cam partner is Judy Kemp, a retired physician.

Every few weeks, Judy and I drive to Volcan Mountain — or Hahachepahg, its Kumeyaay name, which means “where the water comes from.” Today Judy is driving, so I hop out to unlock the gate to the 31,000-acre Volcan Mountain Wilderness Preserve. In her Jeep, we wind upward through rising hillsides spiked with burned and leaning trees. At an elevation of almost 5,000 feet, we park beneath a grove of ponderosas and cedars. Then we walk along a trail of switchbacks flanked by poison oak.

At a high turn on the path, we find the motion-activated night-vision camera in its locked box strapped to a tree. We collect the camera’s memory card, replace the batteries and insert a new card. Then we return to the car and drive down to the Volcan Mountain Foundation’s education center. There, hunched over a laptop, we’re eager to see what pops up on the screen.

Maybe we’ll find another parade of foxes or coyotes, perhaps bobcats. Or gentle opossums — with their opposable thumbs, prehensile tails, fainting spells and 3-year lifespans. Also some California jays and mountain doves, or an intense

owl staring at the lens. Occasionally, a mountain lion (or cougar or puma — pick a name) — perhaps a mother with two grown cubs — will make an appearance.

We enter the data and send the photos on their way. These will be considered later by researchers studying Volcan’s evolving ecology.

On today’s trip up the slope, after an unexpected snow and windstorm, large sheets of ice and snow cover much of the road and hiking trail. Fallen trees are on our path. On foot, we crouch and weave our way through broken branches. A mountain lion has crossed a hard patch of snow.

I reach down and touch the impression of the big cat’s track.

Later, we sit on cut logs in a dry, sheltered grove of pines and rest. Purple mushrooms surround us. Judy says she’s been thinking about her perceptions of nature, how she notices the visual details, mainly when birding. “But lately,” she adds, “I’ve been wondering if I’m missing something. It’s a feeling.”

In the past, she avoided what she considered overanalyzing nature, believing it would lessen the experience and fill it with words. But now, she wonders, “Is there something ... something I’m not seeing or feeling?”

Her voice trails off. She looks down. Her eyes are searching.

One day, I was walking up our hill, feeling, well, disembodied, disconnected from people and activity and my usual life. At that moment, I realized how absorbed I was with the chatter and combat of acorn woodpeckers, the individual characters of clouds, the scent of oaks and pines and cedars, their limbs lifting in the wind, and the leaf-litter passageways that led into darkness or light.

A group of turkeys, two females and a gaggle of chicks, shot across the road in front of me. One chick held back. I stopped to wait for it to catch up with the rest. Watching them, I was curious about how they notice life in their world.

From the writings of naturalist Joe Hutto, I knew that turkeys come genetically preloaded with survival skills. They arrive in this world already knowing the difference between a rattlesnake and a garter snake.

They understand that the garter snake means no harm to them. But throughout their lives, they go beyond their survival manual; they learn. Having never seen a garter snake, a turkey will stop and blurt a particular sound. The other turkeys will come running and they will study the snake. Like a model in an art class, the snake will allow itself to be observed.

And when the turkeys know that snake, they move on, pecking their way through turkey territory. They see each field, each tree, each gully, each animal. From these details, they construct a world in their minds.

As I watched the turkeys, I recalled how, during my decades as a reporter and columnist, I would enter a room and begin to gather the details — the clock on the wall, the pattern and texture of the wallpaper, the toy on the floor. When the people I came to interview walked into the room, I peeked at their shoes, their clothes, their eyeglasses. Then, in the surrounding neighborhood, I gathered more details and later constructed a hologram of that person or place.

Sharing the finished piece of writing would produce a sense of satisfaction. But the product was not where the joy



PHOTO BY RICHARD LOUV FROM “NOTICING”

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Cover Story: The Beginning of Wonder



PHOTO BY RICHARD LOUV FROM "NOTICING"

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was. The joy was in the noticing.

I felt that as a boy, during countless hours spent in the woods, when everything seemed new or reborn. I want to feel that joy again.

The term deep noticing does not represent a new concept. It has been practiced and taught in various forms, by different names, for thousands of years across cultures.

Now a new surge of research suggests the existence of a deeper, more mysterious network of life on Earth. Humans possess far more senses to perceive this network than Western society has generally acknowledged. Drawing on ancient wisdom and modern science, we're rediscovering that the forest is enchanted — and that we

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can become bioenchanted.

A friend, Janet Keating, sent me a note addressing these ideas.

Janet has devoted her adult life to fighting mountaintop removal in West Virginia. She wrote, "Deep noticing — isn't it about seeing with the heart? Connecting on an emotional level with

nature, being present, accepting what we sense rather than only what we first see? It's a reciprocal relationship, a dialogue. We seldom find what we're not looking for. God is hiding in plain sight."

We can find hope and healing, no matter where we live.

In the meantime, I keep walking, hoping to notice more, to know enough to know when to come home and to know where home is, even as it changes.

Here is good but fragile news. Counter-intuitively, even as we mourn the destruction of so many species, lands and waters, the natural world offers us an antidote to our growing despair. We can find relief right there in our peripheral vision, in the deep and wavering current followed by native trout, in a line of swifts living most of their lives in flight, in the tracks of a mountain lion along a worn path.

A path of wonderment.

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."
— African proverb (Origin unknown)

Contributors

Meet the Team

FOUNDER & EDITOR



LEIGH FENLY was a staff writer and editor at *The San Diego Union-Tribune* for 30 years, where she edited the award-winning Quest science section. She is co-founder and past co-president of Women's Empowerment International, a nonprofit that provides microfinance loans and other support to women across the world. She has volunteered as a tutor for refugee children and at her neighborhood food pantry. Currently, she is a volunteer docent at Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve.

STAFF WRITERS



ROBERT KRIER wrote and edited for *The San Diego Union-Tribune*

for 32 years. He covered local weather for 20 years and also reported on climate-change issues. He retired in 2020. He now spends much of his time outdoors, marveling at weather, trees, wildlife and nature.



MARY CURRAN-DOWNEY has been interviewing people her whole life — and

writing those stories for radio, magazines and newspapers for more decades than she cares to disclose. Her sons are now grown and flown, so she concentrates on reading, quilting, traveling, spending time with friends and family — and always, always asking questions and interviewing everyone she meets.



LISA PETRILLO is an award-winning journalist, science writer

and author devoted to reading and discovery and her adopted California home. She's a former competitive figure skater who has written extensively about murder and mayhem, the space program, the wonders of physics and the world's most powerful lasers.



SCOTT LAFÉE is vice president of communications at Sanford Burnham Prebys. Previously, he was director of media relations for health sciences research at UC San Diego. Before that for 18 years, he was a science writer/editor for the *The San Diego Union-*

Tribune, covering all scientific disciplines for the Quest science section. With Dilip Jeste, MD, he is co-author of "Wiser: The Scientific Roots of Wisdom, Compassion and What Makes Us Good" (2020).



JEANNETTE DE WYZE worked as a staff writer at the *San Diego Reader* for 30 years. Today, in addition to raising puppies to be service dogs for Canine Companions, she's a frequent contributor to the Friends of Bonobos blog. She and her husband

also serve as the volunteer liaisons between Women's Empowerment International and the Nyaka Grannies Project in Uganda. She travels often and maintains an active travel blog, [At Home and Abroad](#).

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— African proverb (Origin unknown)

Meet the Team

COPY EDITOR

MARGARET KING has worked since 2009 as a writer and editor for Sally Ride Science, a nonprofit based at UC San Diego that seeks to inspire girls and boys of all backgrounds in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). Previously, she was an editor at *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. She received her bachelor's degree in English and history from UC Berkeley and her master's degree in journalism from Columbia.



ART DIRECTOR

AMY STIRNKORB is an art director and designer. After a decade at *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, she launched her own design studio and cookbook publishing company. She has been involved with a number of nonprofits including Rescue House, Women's Empowerment International, and co-founded Educreate to inspire and empower young creators through art and technology.



PHOTOGRAPHERS

ROBERT SCHNEIDER

retired as professor emeritus at Southwestern College after teaching photography for 33 years. During his tenure, he co-created a film and video production curriculum. He served as a founding board member of the Museum of Photographic Arts in Balboa Park. He was also a founding member of the Binational Association of Schools of Communications, which comprised colleges and universities from both sides of the border. He continues his involvement with photography and video production.



JILIAN BURETZ

is a San Diego-based portrait and event photographer known for authentic, story-driven imagery. Drawing from her background in social work, she approaches every assignment with a genuine love for people and community.



ILLUSTRATOR

CRISTINA BYVIK

is an award-winning illustrator and designer who has worked with clients such as *The Washington Post*, Starbucks and The Old Globe Theatre. Most recently she served as the graphics director at *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. She has received recognition for her illustrations, designs and information graphics from the Society of News Design. Cristina grew up in the Republic of Panama and has a B.F.A. in illustration from Ringling College of Art and Design. A lifelong *futbol* fan, she lives in Encinitas with her husband, son and golden retriever.



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