

Life in LAMORINDA

Lush Lawns, Pest-Free Homes . . . But At What Cost?

By Jennifer Wake



Creeks like this one behind Chow in Lafayette, meander through much of Lamorinda and feed directly into the Delta and the Bay

Photo Jennifer Wake

The Lamorinda area is well-known for its natural beauty, with its homes set amongst natural vegetation or perched near meandering creeks. But when homeowners are unaware of safer

alternatives to toxic pesticides, keeping homes and gardens beautiful and pest-free can come at a cost to our health and the environment.

According to the Contra

Costa County Agricultural Commissioners Office, the Lamorinda area contracts out one of the County's largest scheduled bi-monthly applications by pest control operators, underscoring an alarming trend of increased insect and weed eradication in more affluent areas.

Additionally, a report by the Pesticides Action Network North America (PANNA) and Californians for Pesticide Reform revealed that, in California, use of carcinogenic pesticides had more than doubled from 1991 to 1998, and that total pesticide use in 1998 was at the highest level ever reported. Insecticides, fungicides, herbicides, rodenticides, and microcides (disinfectants) are all considered pesticides.

A former Cal/EPA investigator with a master's degree in public health, Moraga resident Susan JunFish understood some of the dangers of toxic chemicals. When she and her family moved to the area in 2002, she set out to enroll her 3-year-old son in preschool, but after visiting over 20 preschools, she saw many environmental hazards including pesticide use at the sites.

"I witnessed many preventable environmental hazards where children were being exposed to

cleaning products and saw two incidents where pesticides were being sprayed as children were walking by," she said. "One local preschool was even exposing kids to lead by letting kids play inside old computer screen terminals. Staff often diluted bleach (sodium hypochlorite) incorrectly and used disinfectants improperly."

A 2004 study by the University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine found that children exposed to pesticides or cleaning products, particularly under age one, are 2.5 to 4.5 times more likely to have permanent (chronic) asthma by the time they're five.

In August of 2002, JunFish founded the Parents for a Safer Environment (PfSE) - a grass roots organization dedicated to reducing preventable environmental hazard exposures to children. "I wanted to figure a way to inform and somehow reach out to preschools at large."

The majority of PfSE's work has been assisting public agencies such as local towns and school districts and the county to reduce the use of unnecessary pesticides and use safer alternatives. Their work has been mostly volunteer and partially funded by small grants from local, non-profit, county and state

agencies.

Over the course of two years, PfSE worked with the Town of Moraga to implement an integrated pest management (IPM) plan, which was approved last year. Thanks to its implementation, parks in Moraga have the distinction of being one of the "least pesticides applied" areas in Contra Costa County. PfSE has also taken several calls from parents in Lafayette and Orinda who have witnessed spraying in their schools and parks, and hope they take the lead in pursuing IPM policies in their towns.

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Moraga resident Sam Laudy, 21 months, plays without worry of toxic pesticide use on the grass at Moraga Commons

Photo Jennifer Wake

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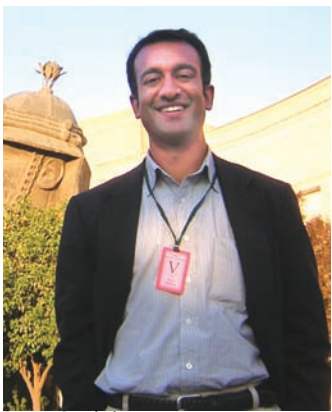
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Campo Alumni to Talk About Iraq at Saint Mary's

By Sophie Braccini



Rajiv in Bagdad

Photo courtesy of Rajiv Chandrasekaran

Living in Baghdad's "Green Zone" shortly after the US invasion of Iraq, Rajiv Chandrasekaran, a young journalist for the Washington Post and alumni of Campolindo High School, was keenly aware of the privileged enclave he was working in as the war raged all around. Yet, it was from this stable aberration that most American officials based their decisions on rebuilding Iraq and as Chandrasekaran argues, that's exactly why the decisions were so out of touch with Iraqi reality.

Chandrasekaran moved to Moraga with his family from Palo Alto in 1987 and he completed his high school years at Campolindo. There, his favorite subjects were science and math and he actively con-

sidered becoming a doctor or engineer. However, his interest in news research and reporting started with his participation in "La Puma," Campo's student newspaper. He remembers how Edward Hewitson, English teacher and journalism adviser had a profound influence on him and his interest in reporting the news.

After graduating, Chandrasekaran re-crossed the bay to attend Stanford where he majored in Political Science. There too, he gravitated toward journalism and edited the Stanford Daily, the student newspaper that's been publishing news since 1892. A month after graduation, Chandrasekaran was offered an internship at the Washington Post that eventually turned into a permanent position.

At the Post, Chandrasekaran began reporting on business issues and his background in Silicon Valley made him a perfect choice for covering technology issues. In 2000, he was offered the opportunity to cover South East Asia for the Post. In Chandrasekaran's words, "this was a great new adventure, I had never traveled to that part of the world, and I was interested in living overseas, in discovering new countries as well as seeing my own from further away."

At 26, he found himself stationed in Djakarta Indonesia for 2 1/2 years. There he covered issues and events such as the 2000 Olympic games in Sydney, Australia and President Clinton's historic visit to Vietnam. After 9/11, he reported extensively from the hot spots of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Chandrasekaran believes that his physical appearance might have allowed him to be accepted in this part of the world. In 2002, his editor moved him to Cairo so he could better cover the Middle East. Then he was stationed in Baghdad six months prior to the commencement of the Iraqi war and became the Post's bureau chief in Baghdad August 2004.

From his experiences came the book: "Imperial Life in the Emerald City - Inside Iraq's Green Zone." "It was a crazy world inside the Green Zone," says Chandrasekaran, "many of the decisions were made in the protected area by people who had been sent by the White House based on political loyalty rather than cultural, technical or operational competency.

They didn't always see what was really important and relevant to the Iraqi people like jobs or electricity." Chandrasekaran witnessed the aftermath and how it led to

protests and dissatisfaction with the American occupation.

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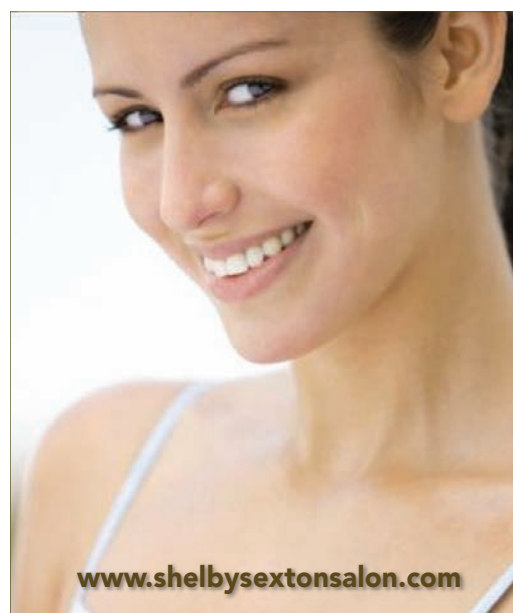
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