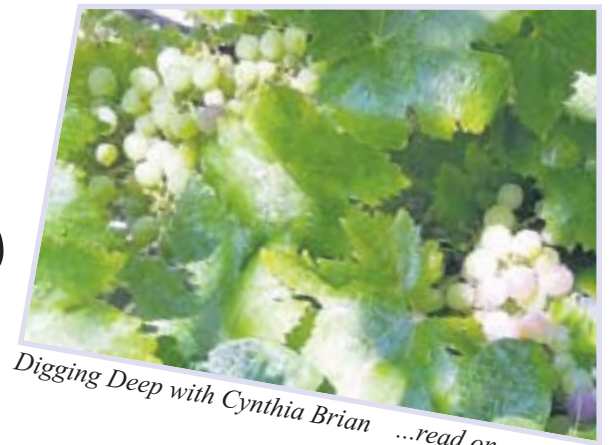


Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Orinda's Rain Trackers

By Andrea A. Firth

By the end of our Sunday morning walk, my husband and I were soaked. Well maybe not soaked, but we were wet. We had hiked the last ten minutes in the rain, not a downpour, but fat, heavy raindrops fell steadily all around us. That was September 11th. Rain already, really? My first thought was that it was time to check in with the rain trackers.

"In California for so many years, we could count on no rain from May to October. But this year it rained measurably in June," says Lynn Trowbridge. She has lived in Orinda since the mid-1970's and started tracking the rainfall in her Sleepy Hollow neighborhood almost twenty years ago. "I was just curious," says Trowbridge, "I wondered about the intensity of the rains and the impact. We live in an area where four inches of rain in four hours can make a real difference." Trowbridge tracked the daily rainfall with a plastic gauge for years and now uses a self-emptying automated gauge. She reads the rainfall measurements each morning around 7:00 a.m. as she stands warm and dry in her kitchen. [see chart on page D4]

Susan Watson has been following rainfall for over three decades from her house half way up a ridge on the south side of Orinda. She started tracking the rain after severe droughts hit the Bay Area in the late seventies. "We had as little as 12 to 14 inches of rain and were on very strict water restrictions. I would check the water meter constantly to see how much we had to use," says Watson. The marks on her 8-inch plastic gauge have worn away from exposure over the years, but she can still record daily rainfall down to .05 inches. Watson filled several stenographer's notebooks with her rain measurements but has since switched to a computerized record.

"We're not meteorologists. We're amateur rain collectors," says Allan Prager, who keeps his meticulous daily rain measurements on the refrigerator in his kitchen under a magnet that says Save Water. His cone-shaped, plastic gauge is attached to the railing of the deck outside the kitchen on the second story. Prager also lives in Sleepy Hollow but in a forested pocket several hundred feet below his neighbor Trowbridge who resides up on the ridge.

Trowbridge, Watson, and Prager are rain trackers.

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From left: Allen Prager, Lynn Trowbridge and Susan Watson

Photo Andy Scheck