

Published March 8th, 2017

Ten years as a Lamorinda Weekly reporter

By *Sophie Braccini*

Lamorinda Weekly past and current editors, Lee Borrowman, Peggy Spear and Jennifer Wake.
Photo A. Scheck

Ten years ago, when I told my mother that I had gotten a job at Lamorinda Weekly, I heard disappointment in her voice after I explained what the paper was, "You are going to write about "les chiens écrasés" - road-kills," she said. Since I graduated from the Political Science Institute in Paris, my mother had always dreamed that I would work for "Le Monde" or other prominent international paper. She was disappointed, and she was so wrong! For the past 10 years I have been reporting about stories on a micro-local scale often just as riveting as what is playing on the national scene.

□ Lamorinda is a microcosm of this country with many of the same elements at play: the developers fighting the environmentalist; the (few) global-warming deniers fighting the more progressives; those who play nice and those who don't; the big sports rivalries, the economic challenges; the struggling businesses crushed by online purchasing; those who hate government and those who support it. Yes, there is everything in Lamorinda, including "foreign policy" stories: haven't you

heard about those who want to erect a wall or a barrier to prevent some of their neighbors to come in?

□ Lamorinda governments struggle with maintaining their infrastructure, with creating an inclusive social fabric from schools to businesses, and at times very narrow minded interests, as well as a feel of privilege, got the best of the Lamorinda community.

□ Over the years, as my own children were growing, I saw the three communities change and transform. In Moraga especially, I saw a very closed public process open up and residents becoming more and more engaged. In Lafayette we witnessed the remarkable progresses of Sustainable Lafayette and how, with Bart Carr and Steve Richards leading, it has become a citywide organization. There too we saw the erection of the library, the long creation of the vision for downtown development, and we wrote about the blooming of one of the most successful retail centers and restaurant scenes around.

□ For nine years I also covered the Lamorinda business news and met incredible people. I saw homes made of Insulated Concrete Forms, one of the first LEED platinum buildings with the most advanced features, the inventor of -among other things - the Echo pen that records and films note-taking, one of the largest angel investors network in the country, or people creating a new frontier in the internet-of-things. I also met countless budding entrepreneurs that created and marketed everything from echo-lunch boxes to gluten-free snacks and those brave brick-and mortar creators that defy online shopping like Venture in Lafayette or Orinda Books. Hats off to them!

□ The number of remarkable typical Lamorinda stories I was exposed to started with the first article I wrote 10 years ago: it was about the crosses of Lafayette. There I saw how motivated individuals could make a difference, reach out to those with a very different perspective and how together they built something unique. Ten years later I wrote about an exhibition at the Jennifer Perlmutter Gallery about those crosses, closing a circle that went from emotional outrage to symbolic desire for peace.

□ There were many more uplifting Lamorinda adventures to report about. Let's not forget the rise of the Lamorinda urban chicken that got approved in Lafayette before being accepted in Moraga; the growth of the Lamorinda Wine Growers Association and its successful bid to make Lamorinda a recognized viticulture area; the creation of more open space such as the purchase of Carr Ranch by the John Muir Land Trust; and all the art initiatives that flourish from the galleries, to classes and all the performing art produced by truly remarkable groups such as CalShakes and Town Hall Theater.

□ But above all what my mother did not understand, at least not at the time, was the amazing richness of the human beings I was going to be able to meet and share with others. And in the process of writing about the Lamorinda human adventure, I was changed.

□ I have met several inspiring leaders such as Budd McKenzie who created a nonprofit, Trust in Education, to bring support to the children of Afghanistan. I met business people that had become spiritual beings such as Mark Drevno who became a certified Buddhist interfaith chaplain for inmates; countless volunteers such as Cliff Dochterman, former president of Rotary International. These and people like them find meaning in giving their time and skills to a cause. I have also witnessed the rise of a Lamorinda mindfulness movement that seeks to support children and adults alike in their quest for grounding and happiness.

□ Yes, Lamorinda has a culture of privileges and affluence, and several stories would also speak of selfishness and a desire to keep outsiders out. But there are hopefully more generous and selfless residents who aim at making their communities and the world a better place. Writing for Lamorinda Weekly, where I did not need to tweak the news to sell more ads, has been a privilege. Here is to the next 10 years!

□
□

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA