Annette Burden

Writing Sample:

Santa Barbara Magazine, "City Stories" columns

Brighter, Boulder

Several hand-lettered signs appeared near Mission Santa Barbara in the final weeks of last year. "Honk if you love the boulder," one said. "We want the blue boulder back," demanded another.

The midnight-blue, baby-whale-sized rock in question lay under wraps in the yard of its owner and maker, Dan Chrynko. Chrynko, an artist and tile setter in Santa Barbara for the past 16 years, had to rescue his artwork from a Parks and Recreation storage lot. That's where officials unceremoniously dumped *Across the Universe* after evicting it from the little city-owned patch of land at the mouth of Mission Canyon.

Chrynko, 45, a man with a ready smile under lanky blond hair, placed the boulder on the median strip in October as a treat for visitors on their way to the Art Walk show and sale at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. He planned to haul it away after the weekend, but wound up leaving it at the encouragement of scores of residents and tourists. The city, however, received complaints from a few who felt the shiny blue rock, inlaid with six gold stars, detracted from the area's natural beauty. Officials ordered it hauled away in mid-December.

All of Chrynko's works currently rest on private property, including the new sidewalk mosaic at Montecito's Palazzio restaurant and a giant sunflower-covered boulder along Mountain Drive. Motorists often stop on Puesta del Sol Road to see the five tiled boulders outside the home Chrynko shares with his wife and teenage daughters.

A landowner whose property abuts Rocky Nook Park commissioned the pair of eight-foot red and blue alligators—*Ethyl* and *Harry*—that attract admirers to a bank of Mission Creek. Neighbors say that vagrants have largely disappeared from the area since families took to congregating at the site. In November, the figures inspired the local dance troupe Improv, Inc., to stage a performance on the spot.

Chrynko, who studied art in his native Chicago and received his degree from the Art Institute of San Francisco, sells watercolors through the Mark Hopkins Gallery in San Francisco and the Simeon Gallery in Laguna Beach. His price for a boulder begins around $2,500. The tiling takes time, discipline, and planning, he says, but it's fairly easy. In 1995 he taught a workshop in mosaics at Anacapa School, and the students' boulder won top honors at the Santa Barbara Fair and Expo. Chrynko's ultimate dream: to see a mosaic park in town made by and for kids.

Chrynko came up with the idea of encasing boulders in bright, happy colors two years ago. The impulse arose, he says because he wanted to give something back to Santa Barbara. "It feels like such a privilege to live here. Of course, the natural beauty inspires artists of every kind."

Chrynko admits he has little hope of gaining approval for his work from the city's Visual Art in Public Places Committee. He jokes that he's thinking about changing his name to Bottoms, in reference to local sculptor Bud Bottoms whose bronze dolphins decorate several public sites around town. He also admits to having little patience with the current fashion for conceptual art, including art that's rude or obscene. He seeks only to please the eye.

"Nearly everybody seems to like the boulders," he says. "They're simple and unpretentious, just shapes from nature and pretty colors, something to brighten up the day."

Santa by the Sea

Santa Barbara, Santa Maria, Santa Ynez, Santa Monica, Santa Ana—Santa Claus? In 1948, the joke spawned a theme for a five-stool orange juice stand north of Carpinteria.

Nearly 50 years later, thanks to Santa's universal appeal, thirsty motorists and their kids have consumed uncounted gallons of orange juice—along with "world-famous" date shakes, Cokes, Vixen burgers, Comet's omelets, saltwater taffy, fudge, gingerbread men and more, much more. They've browsed through collectibles by

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the ton: teapots, Hummel figurines, cookie cutters, shell mobiles, Barbie Dolls, Nerf toys, rubber sharks, Pogs, and Slammers.

From Highway 101, it's hard to miss the 20-foot red and white icon that rises from a chimney atop Santa's Candy Kitchen—especially against the backdrop of bright blue California sky. A few Grinches call this Santa-by-the-sea an eyesore and an abomination. But for many the plaster figure has great sentimental value. It also represents a vanishing breed of vintage Americana.

In June 1988, the roadside attraction gained official recognition. Well-meaning new owners Tom and Carolyn Pappas had planned to remove the dilapidated Santa from the roof and update the theme to Cape Cod-Tyrolean. To Santa's rescue came county historian David Stone, who, after a little research, declared the figure a historical landmark. The lane's main complex kept its yuletide theme, and Santa got a new coat of paint.

At one time, visitors romped through a mini zoo, penny arcade, and magic shop and rode on a merry-go-round and gas-powered miniature train. They marveled at a 50-foot North Pole clad in perpetual frost. Frosty the Snowman, Santa's 20-foot sheet-metal companion of many years, disappeared with the blessing of the County Resource Management Department in 1987. A handmade carousel, purchased with high hopes in 1988, stands idle, victim of the high cost of insurance and permits. Yet eateries and shops continue to thrive, including the new Carousel Gallery and Claus's Country Cottage gift shop.

The lane upholds a tradition in commercial buildings and roadside advertising that began its heyday in the 1920s, when motoring became a way of life for Americans. Just a few of the lane's more well-known cousins include the nationwide Burma-Shave signs ("Statistics Prove/ Near and Far/ That Folks/ Who Drive/ Like Crazy/ ...Are!"), the statewide Big Do-Nut chain, and Los Angeles's famous Tail O' the Pup hot-dog stand. Preservationist Stone describes the lane's style as mimetic. UCSB professor and architectural historian David Gebhard categorizes it as roadside vernacular, or "programatic."

Despite such lofty labeling, the Santa image itself—the rosy-cheeked, grandfatherly fellow in a red and white coat—sprang from humble origins in American advertising. In 1931, ad artist Haddon Sundblom transformed a crusty Old Saint Nick into the twinkly-eyed figure we know today.

Not incidentally, he propped a soft drink in Santa's hand, in hopes that folks would start drinking Coca-Cola not only in warm weather, but in winter. Judging from the popularity of Santa Claus Lane, the idea of using a North Pole pitchman to boost sales on the sunny South Coast wasn't such a stretch after all.

Viva la Salsa

Across the nation, salsa now outsells ketchup as the condiment of choice on the American dinner table, according to the New York-based research firm Packaged Facts. This is partially due to a Santa Barbara company, which last year sent more than 1.6 million pounds of the spicy concoction to wake up taste buds from one end of the country to the other.

"Large parts of the East Coast and Midwest think Santa Barbara invented salsa," quips Craig Bigelow, president of Santa Barbara Creative Foods, Inc. He believes that because his product hit many shelves first, the Santa Barbara label defines salsa for some consumers much as Campbell's means soup or Heinz means ketchup.

Santa Barbara's affinity for salsa dates to the days of the Californios. "Old California never considered a barbecue or a *comida al fresco* complete without this refreshing vegetable relish," wrote author-historian Ana Bégué de Packman in 1935. Her recipe for purists in *Early California Hospitality* calls for tomatoes, one small onion, and a half-teaspoon salt.

José "Joe" Martinez, head chef at Joe's Café in Santa Barbara for 21 years, says he perfected his famous salsa at another Santa Barbara institution, Harry's Plaza Café. Martinez, who worked at Harry's for 12 years before transferring to Joe's, says that Harry's featured complimentary pre-dinner bread and salsa even before he came

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on board. Martinez's "secret" ingredients include white pepper, Louisiana hot sauce, Worcestershire sauce, scallions, sweet basil, oregano, and olive oil. "No, it's not Mexican," he says with a grin, "it's Santa Barbaran."

Equally irresistible, if entirely different in character, Bigelow's fresh salsa recalls the old-style simplicity of Santa Barbara's early days. Every week the factory purchases 20,000 pounds of ripe red Roma tomatoes, 3,000 pounds of onions, and 1,500 pounds of peppers—green bell, Anaheim, and jalapeño.

Bigelow, who closed his State Street restaurant Head of the Wolf ten years ago, was casting around for a new direction when he decided to give selling salsa a whirl. "I knew that every restaurant in town served it in one shape or form," he says. "I knew that Mexican food was gaining in popularity, and I didn't know anyone who didn't like salsa once they tried it." What's more, he simply like the sound of Santa Barbara Salsa.

At first he sold his fresh product through small local stores like Pierre Lafond and Miratti's. Then, to his surprise, he won a contract to supply 18 Safeway supermarkets in the region. "I thought, my god, how am I ever going to manufacture for 18 stores?" But with the help of a skilled production manager, Octavio Morelos, he succeeded. Today the company still relies on Morelos's expertise, plus an office staff of four and a team of ten "tomato surgeons." The line of products now includes a variety of fresh and bottled salsas. Bigelow expects sales to nearly double this year to 3 million pounds.

Eight years ago Bigelow spent a month in New York putting Santa Barbara Salsa on shelves from one end of Manhattan to the other. The product still ranks as one of the city's best-selling salsas. And the Santa Barbara label now beams from shelves and refrigerated units in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Maine—not to mention the Midwest, Rocky Mountain, and Western states.

Bigelow admits that Santa Barbara's cachet goes a long way in helping to sell his salsa. "I travel a lot," he says, "and when people ask where I'm from and I say Santa Barbara, they act like it's the Mecca of the Western Hemisphere."

Toads in Trouble

Like the miner's canary, California's arroyo toad has a keen sensitivity to change that makes it a natural alarm when our environment is threatened. And lately, that alarm has been sounding.

The toads once ranged from Baja California to San Luis Obispo County. But as humans poured into Southern California, their domain shrank. In the early 1990s, UCSB biology professor Samuel Sweet determined that fewer than 350 arroyo toads remained, a dramatic decline from previous levels. The numbers swelled to over 5,000 a few years later thanks to generous rains and such U.S. Forest Service efforts as timely road, trail, and campsite closings. But last year 90 percent of Sweet's tagged population vanished inexplicably.

The survivors, in Santa Barbara County and to the south, live primarily near headwaters of creeks and rivers. Only five small, isolated populations are known to remain in Los Padres National Forest. About two inches long, the adults wear a camouflage of moss-and-pebble-colored skin and sleep during the day. They need undisturbed, shallow, slow-moving water to reproduce.

Stoppage of creeks or a sudden flush by water resource management can play havoc with their cycles. The toads also face age-old enemies including snakes, raccoons, and moles as well as introduced predators such as catfish and bullfrogs. Even more devastating, Sweet says, are the increasing numbers of fun seekers who can wipe out a year's worth of toadlets in one creek-side game of Frisbee—or 5,000 tadpole eggs in one splashfest with an off-road vehicle.

Marc Chytilo, chief counsel for the tri-county Environmental Defense Center, took up the toads' cause in 1991 and fought for their protection under the federal Endangered Species Act. After a review by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in January the arroyo toad received the official designation, joining a list that includes the local willow flycatcher, least Bell's vireo, tidewater goby, and four species of fairy shrimp.

The label "endangered" carries no guarantee of

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a comeback. There are success stories, like the brown pelican's return following a ban on the pesticide DDT. But since the act passed in 1973, more than 300 animals under consideration have fallen off the list into extinction.

"The arroyo toad *will* be extinct unless we change the way we're using the land," Sweet says. He also fears that efforts to protect beleaguered habitats may be neutralized in coming months. Currently up for reauthorization in Congress, the Endangered Species Act faces a regime in Washington that has vowed to expunge all regulations that unduly restrain economic growth.

Last fall the Santa Barbara Zoo dedicated proceeds from its annual Zoo-B-Que fundraiser to a new educational exhibit. Toad Hall will shelter a handful of arroyo toads in a replica of their riparian habitat. Designed to showcase the toads' bright-eyed charm while alerting viewers to the sensitivity of local ecosystems, the exhibit should open early this spring.

"Sometimes I think the influence we have on adult visitors in minimal," confesses Tom Overskei, the zoo's veterinarian. "It's the kids I think we can reach." He hopes the next time Dad goes tearing up the creek in his ATV, a son or daughter might say, "Hey, Dad, what about the toads?"

The Egg Came First

Drop by the Bird Diversity Hall at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History and you'll see hundreds of eggs along with more than 400 species of local birds. But that's only a fraction of the museum's holdings. Behind the scenes, the Collections and Research Center houses the tenth largest egg collection in the world—more than 11,000 nestfuls of eggs from more than 1,300 species.

William Leon Dawson, a former Congregationalist preacher, eminent ornithologist, and passionate egg collector, came to Santa Barbara in 1910 from Seattle, Washington. He came determined to write the first comprehensive book on California's birds and to establish oology, the study of eggs, as a legitimate science.

On January 31, 1916, Dawson gathered a small group of Santa Barbarans at his Mission Canyon home, Los Colibris, where he outlined plans to found the Museum of Comparative Oology. A dynamic, highly persuasive speaker and writer, he convinced a newly elected board of directors to donate nearly $10,000 for the museum's initial operating costs.

Dawson believed the study of eggs would reveal the secret of life. "The life stream is the architect of the egg," he declared, "and the bird is only the builder." In the museum's *Journal of Comparative Oology*, he responded to bird lovers who accused collectors of decimating the avian population. "We are not advocating the indiscriminate collection of birds' eggs, any more than we are the 'indiscriminate' robbing of hens' nests," he wrote. "But if the human race requires hens' eggs for food and birds' eggs for study, we reckon that the human race will continue to help itself in common sense fashion."

From the first, Dawson adamantly opposed his board's wishes to expand into other areas of natural history. In late 1922, while he wanted ongoing control of the museum, he asked for a leave of absence to complete *The Birds of California* later that year, thanks to an estimated $125,000 from the philanthropist E.B. Scripps of La Jolla. Bird and book lovers still prize the work for its exquisite illustrations and lively prose.

These days the museum's researchers observe animals in their habitats. They do not collect them. Yet specimens from the past, along with examples newly deceased because of accidents or natural causes, serve as important sources of data. Altogether, the museum holds more than 40,000 vertebrate specimens, including birds and eggs, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and mammals.

The egg collection's manager, Assistant Curator of Vertebrate Zoology Krista Fahy, frequently responds to queries from biologists preparing environmental impact reports. Because the meticulously documented collection spans 150 years, it may show whether a certain species of flycatcher, for instance, ever nested in a particular area. Besides answering questions from researchers and the public, studying birds in the field, and contributing to the

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museum's Web site, Fahy enjoys introducing classes of fascinated schoolchildren to the egg collection that hatched one of finest museums of its kind in America.

Time Keepers

An estimated 50 gems of early Chumash rock art hide in the Santa Barbara backcountry. While some date from California's mission era, others may be up to 2,000 years old.

The precise meaning of the largely red, black, and white symbols died with the Chumash artist-priests and teachers who painted them. But the outlines of stars and "suns," human figures, and creatures like condors, coyotes, and bears suggest links to known legends and beliefs of the Native Americans who first civilized Santa Barbara.

Many hikers and campers who happen upon the art admit to "the goose-bump experience" and treasure the encounter. But not all are so sensitive. In the last decade, several paintings have disappeared without a trace, some due to natural erosion and others to paint-ball practice, gunshots, and other acts of vandalism. Last April someone painted a bright red serpent across one of the murals.

Luckily, volunteer site stewards on routine patrol for the U.S. Forest Service's Partners in Preservation program discovered the damage in time. Within days the snake was gone—removed by an experienced steward and Janine McFarland, planning archaeologist for Los Padres National Forest and the project's coordinator. McFarland says that conservation techniques applied before the paint could permeate the stone allowed for minimal damage.

In another recent case, someone scraped off a portion of a mural and defaced the rest with graffiti. Quick removal of the graffiti saved what remained of the image. In his site report, a steward included the license number of a lone car seen in the area by another steward the day before the damage was discovered. Law enforcement paid a visit to the suspects, who denied involvement. "We have no proof," McFarland says. "But if they did do it, at least they know we're watching." Convicted vandals face up to ten years' imprisonment and fines of up to $250,000.

Partners in Preservation began in 1993 with 45 stewards in an area bounded by Malibu, Paso Robles, and Frasier Park. This year the program involves about 200 volunteers, 20 of them Native Americans and 50 from the Santa Barbara area.

Local steward Mack Stanton, a retired systems analyst for General Electric, used his talents to design a computer database of the human resources available to the program. At the touch of a few keys, McFarland can pinpoint a volunteer skilled at photography, drawing, or cleaning, someone willing to pitch in with heavy labor, or someone available for patrol. The project links artists, plumbers, wine makers, teachers, divers, housewives, UCSB students—most with little more in common than a love for the art.

Potential stewards sign a confidentiality agreement, promising not to share knowledge of the art's whereabouts except with trusted family members and friends. (The black market in Native American artifacts led to the sites' exemption from the Freedom of Information Act.) Stewards, who must have a record free of felony convictions, complete a full day of classroom instruction on the law, safety in the backcountry, and monitoring techniques, then spend at least ten hours training in the field.

Stewards learn to remove backpacks and other equipment before approaching any rock art. They learn that oil from curious fingers—no matter how loving—and dust stirred up by eager feet adhere to the art, abrade it, and lead to bacterial degradation.

McFarland believes Santa Barbara's rock art rivals prehistoric sites designated world-class in countries like France and Australia. Today, thanks to the volunteers with Partners in Preservation, we have a better chance at keeping it.

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