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Talking with Kalila Volkov



by Mary Parker Malotte

Writer, singer, organic gardener, hiker and Sierra Club member, Kalila Volkov has written a new book inspired from her time spent as a trail host at Point Buchon. She discusses this new project and her views of the natural world.

What has been your journey with writing?

I've kept a diary since I was ten. My first book was a memoir, a compilation of 22 diaries. I felt like it was an interesting story. I enjoy writing nature poems and holiday stories. I'm hoping this new book will be popular.

How did you come to the idea for Hiking Trail, Treasure Land?

Let me backtrack to give you the story. Five years ago, I was in between jobs and I was scanning the want ads and I saw this ad that said "Trail Host at Buchon Trail." And I heard this voice say, "Go now." It was very clear. I took my resume, met with the people, got the job. The trail is so popular and a lot of people wanted that job, so I felt very lucky.

It sounds like the impetus for your book came from following a strong impulse.

Yes. I worked at Point Buchon for four years. About two years into the job, I was doing early morning rounds and, all of a sudden, I felt like I got guidance. I felt that I was coached—"you love this special land, you take a lot of pictures here, why not put them in a book." I felt like it really wasn't my idea, like it was a spirit guide, or an elder, and I felt that it was Chumash, because that land is so rich with that ancestry. So I followed that idea.

Tell me about the book.

It's geared for young readers, and it's color photographs that I took there on the site. After awhile, I had quite a collection. It's not a story; it has captions. It's more "come explore the trail, get out, put your phones away, get away from your computers and just go play outdoors."

So your intention is an invitation?

Yes, I like that. It's so important to reconnect with nature. The goal is to inspire kids and families to do something together. I hope that people will think back to when they went out on a field trip— or to the pumpkin patch or the petting zoo or a farm— and afterwards, they think "wow, that was so refreshing." I just want people to have that same sense of "oh, that felt good!"

What is your general thinking about the natural world?

I do think people need to spend time being quiet outdoors. For me, that's where I feel soothed and healed. I grew up with a Boy Scout leader back in Connecticut and we hiked a lot. Hiking is my favorite outdoor activity. I love flowers. I loved telling people about flowers on the trail at Point Buchon, that was such a great part of the job. And while watching whales breaching!

Favorite flower?

The fairy lanterns are so exquisite.

What has been your involvement with the Sierra Club, other environmental groups or campaigns?

I like being a guardian. I support the local and national Sierra Club to feel like I'm contributing, and because it seems like their philosophy is pretty right on. I like being in California where people are a little more aware. There are so many activists here. I spent time working on Prop 37 [labeling GMO's]. That campaign was so close.

What concerns you?

There's a lot of plastic out there and it's just abominable. My Dad lives in Kentucky and they still don't have curbside recycling. Fracking and climate change.

What qualities do you think are important for activists to have?

Patience. Humility. I'd like to say non-judgment but that seems like a lofty goal. It's so easy to judge people who are contaminating the world. We need nonjudgment as a species. Personally, I feel we are not evolving as quickly as we should be. We need to be caretakers, stewards of this planet.

Ideally, what else would you like to be doing in the next ten years?

More travel would be divine. I'm a singer and I'd like to get into musical theater. More yoga. I do have a bucket list. I want to go to Glacier, and I still haven't gotten to Alaska.

Personal motto?

Nature is my church. Kindness is my religion.

Hiking Trail, Treasure Land will be available in local bookstores, libraries and places of interest this summer. You can also purchase through the author's website, kalilavolkov.com. If you're interested in the Buchon Trail, go to pge.modwest.com.